ROBERT E. HOWARD'S

CONAN THE BARBARIAN

A MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL MAGAZINE

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THE OFFICIAL
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ADAPTATION
OF THE ADVENTURE FILM
OF THE CENTURY

PLUS:
ARTICLES,
INTERVIEWS,
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FROM THE
MOVIE

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DINO DE LAURENTIIS PRESENTS

AN EDWARD R. PRESSMAN PRODUCTION

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER · JAMES EARL JONES IN

"CONAN THE BARBARIAN"

STARRING SANDAHL BERGMAN · BEN DAVIDSON · GERRY LOPEZ · MAKO · WILLIAM SMITH AND MAX VON SYDOW as King Osric

WRITTEN BY JOHN MILIUS AND OLIVER STONE MUSIC BY BASIL POLEDOURIS ASSOCIATE PRODUCER EDWARD SUMMER EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS D. CONSTANTINE CONTE AND EDWARD R. PRESSMAN

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CONAN THE BARBARIAN

STAN LEE PRESENTS
A MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL MAGAZINE

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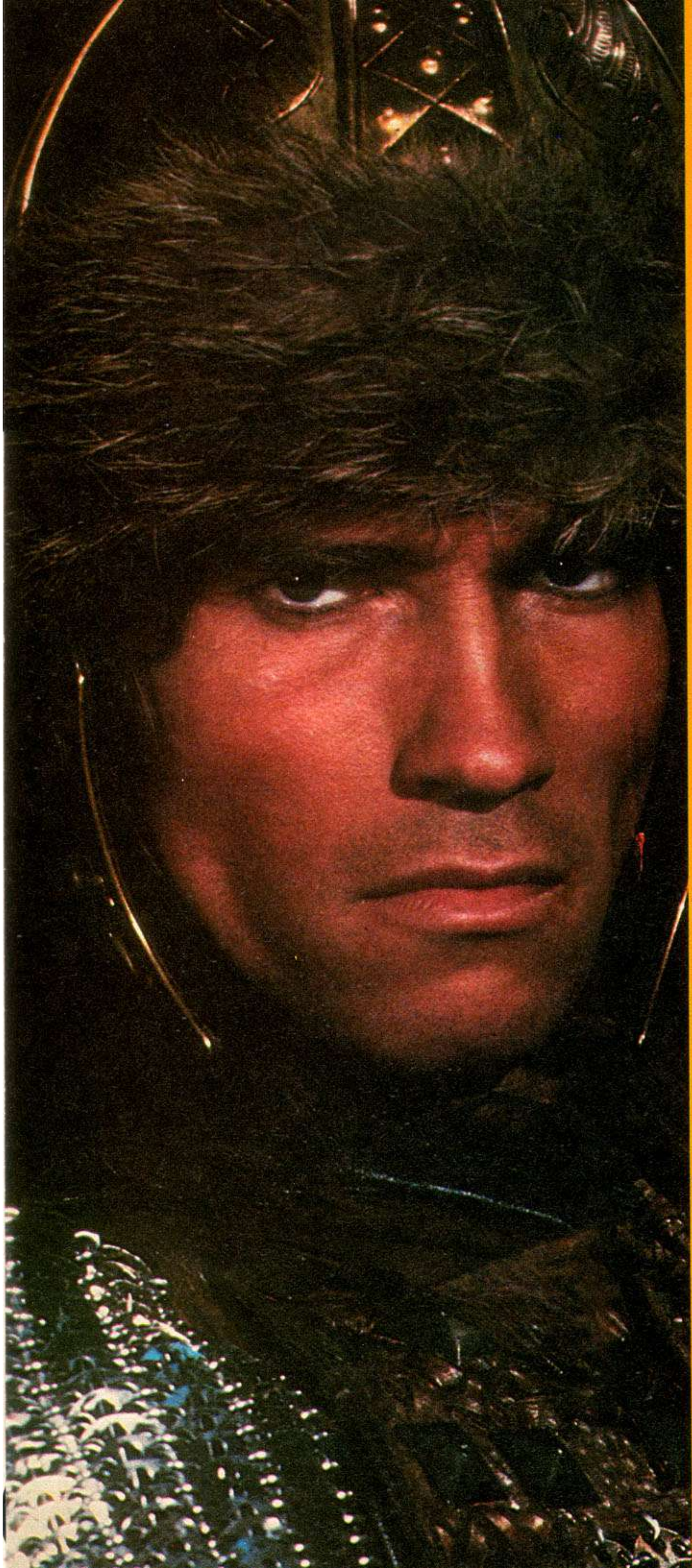


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"Know, O Prince, that between the years when the oceans drank Atlantis and the rise of the sons of Aryas, there was an age undreamed of. Shining kingdoms spread across the world. And hither came I, Conan, a thief, a reaver, a slayer, to tread the jeweled thrones of the Earth beneath my sandaled feet. But now my eyes are dim. Sit on the ground with me, for you are but the leavings of my age. Let me tell you of the days of high adventure..."




YOU ARE MY SON, CONAN! AND THUS IS IT FITTING THAT THIS SWORD, THE GREATEST WORK OF MY LIFE, SHOULD BE YOURS!
FIRE--WIND--THEY COME FROM THE SKY--FROM THE GODS OF THE SKY! BUT CROM IS YOUR GOD! HE LIVES IN THE EARTH!
IN ANCIENT TIMES, CROM HAD MANY SECRETS, BUT GREATEST OF THESE WAS THE SECRET OF STEEL! IN AGES PAST, WE MEN FOUND THE SECRET! BUT BECAUSE WE ARE MERE MEN, AND NOT GODS, STEEL HAS ALWAYS CARRIED WITH IT A MYSTERY!
FOR MEN TO HAVE STEEL, CONAN, THEY MUST LEARN OF ITS RIDDLE! YOU MUST LEARN THE WAY OF STEEL!


LET SHAMANS AND FOOLS BROOD ABOUT CROM, MY SON! HE DOESN'T CARE! PAIN AND SUFFERING AMUSE HIM! LEARN THE RIDDLE OF STEEL AND YOU WON'T NEED CROM!
WHEN THE WAY OF STEEL IS YOURS, CONAN, YOUR SWORD WILL BE YOUR SOUL!
"THUS SPOKE MY FATHER TO ME WHEN I WAS BUT AN UNTRIED BOY...
"LITTLE DID I SUSPECT HOW LITTLE TIME YET REMAINED TO US BEFORE HE WOULD BE TAKEN FROM ME FOREVER...
THE VANIR ARE ATTACKING! FLEE! FLEE!
"THE VANIR ASSAULT WAS SWIFT AND TERRIBLE!
"MY FATHER WITHSTOOD A BLOODY RAIN OF ARROWS--
"--ONLY TO BE TORN TO RIBBONS BY A RAZOR-FANGED HORDE OF VANIR WAR-HOUNDS!
"THE VANIR FLAUNTED THEIR HIDEOUS SNAKE BANNERS CHANTING...
DOOM!
DOOM! DOOM!
"THEY SLEW MY MOTHER WHERE SHE STOOD, AND LEFT HER LYING IN A POOL OF BLOOD...


"THE ENTIRE VILLAGE WAS PUT TO FIRE AND SWORD. I AND THE OTHER CHILDREN WERE LED AWAY IN CHAINS...
"AND AS WE WERE MARCHED AWAY IN THAT COLUMN OF SADNESS, THE LAST SIGHT I BEHELD--
"--WAS THE HEADS OF MY PARENTS GRUESOMELY IMPALED ON A PAIR OF VANIR PIKES!
"WE TRUDGED NORTHWARD, ENDLESSLY NORTHWARD, THROUGH HOWLING WIND AND BLINDING SNOW...
"...ACROSS A GREAT GLACIER AND THROUGH VALLEYS--
"--UNTIL WE ARRIVED FINALLY IN VANAHEIM, THE LAND OF THE VANIR, AND WERE MANACLED TO THE MAN-KILLING WHEEL OF PAIN...
"I WAS WEAK FROM HUNGER AND THE LONG MARCH. BUT ON THE DAY THE VANIR CHAINED ME TO THE WHEEL I MADE A SOLEMN VOW. BENEATH MY BREATH, I MURMURED--
MEN WILL DIE FOR THIS!
"YET THE WEEKS BECAME MONTHS, AND THE MONTHS, YEARS...


"AND STILL I STRAINED AT MY SPOKE OF THE GREAT, MAN-DESTROYING WHEEL...
"ONLY NOW I STRAINED ALONE. THE REST OF MY CIMMERIAN BRETHREN HAD ALL LONG SINCE GONE TO VALHALLA--
"--OR WHEREVER ELSE MEN GO TO WHEN THEY DIE--!!
"AND THEN ONE DAY..."
I OWN YOU, CIMMERIAN! YOU WILL COME WITH ME!
"THE VANIR WHO GUARDED ME UNCHAINED ME FROM THE WHEEL--
"--AND HANDED THE END OF MY CHAIN TO THE RED-BEARDED VANIR WHO HAD BOUGHT ME...
"WHEN RED-HAIR YANKED ON MY CHAIN, I SNARLED AND BARED MY TEETH AT HIM, AS THOUGH I WERE ABOUT TO LUNGE FOR HIS THROAT!
"BUT THE VANIR BOTH WIELDED SWORDS, WHILE I WIELDED NONE...
"I DECIDED IT WAS BETTER TO GO MEEKLY FOR NOW, AND LIVE, THAN TO VENT THE RAGE HOWLING WITHIN ME AND DIE...


"NOT LONG AFTERWARD MY OWNER AND HIS MEN PRODDED ME AT SPEARPOINT INTO A FIGHTING PIT...
"GLOWERING AT ME ACROSS THE PIT WAS A GIGANTIC BLACK MAN WITH RHEUMY, HEAVY-LIDDED EYES AND HIDEOUSLY FILED TEETH...
PREPARE TO MEET WHATEVER GODS YOU PRAY TO, BARBARIAN SCUM!
YOUR FIRST PIT FIGHT IS FATED TO BE YOUR LAST!
CROM!
"LIKE A SNARLING PANTHER, HE LUNGED FOR MY THROAT...
"...HIS SAVAGE JAWS POISED TO TEAR OPEN THE VEIN AT THE TOP OF MY NECK!
BAH! WE'VE BEEN CHEATED! THE FIGHT'S OVER EVEN BEFORE IT'S BEGUN!
NO IT ISN'T! LOOK!
THE BARBARIAN'S TOSSED HIM OVER THAT BRAWNY BACK OF HIS! THE BLACK'S GOING DOWN!



"AYE! AND DOWN HE DID GO!
"BUT IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE HE WAS UP AGAIN, LITHE AND DEADLY AS A JUNGLE CAT!
ARRGHHH!
UNNHHH!
"THE FEROCITY OF HIS CHARGE NEARLY CAVED IN MY CHEST!
"BUT IT ALSO MADE ME ANGRY! AYE, VERY ANGRY!"
DOG OF A BLACK MAN! IF THE WHEEL OF PAIN COULD NOT DESTROY ME, NEITHER WILL YOU DESTROY ME!
NAY! FOR BY THE BONES OF CROM, I'LL DESTROY YOU FIRST!
GNNGHHH!
"HIS HEAD SHATTERED LIKE A RIPE MELON AGAINST THE WALL OF THE PIT...
"...AND THE MOTLEY CROWD CHEERED MY VICTORY WITH HOWLS OF FURY AND OF LUST!


"AND SO I BECAME A SLAYER! A KILLER OF MEN! A PIT FIGHTER!
"SOMETIMES I THOUGHT OF HAVING MY GUTS RIPPED OUT AND LYING THERE IN THE PIT, GAZING UP AT THE MOON, WITH THE CROWD SPITTING AT ME!
I DIDN'T CARE IF I DIED! BUT I DIDN'T DIE! I WON ALL MY BATTLES!
"I WAS FED WELL NOW, AND LIVING THE LIFE OF AN ATHLETE...
"I BEGAN TO REALIZE MY SENSE OF WORTH! THAT I WAS VALUABLE... THAT I MATTERED...!
"I WAS TAKEN EAST, WHERE THE GREATEST WARRIORS TAUGHT ME THEIR SECRETS...
YOU ARE AN ADEPT PUPIL, CONAN!
NOW LET ME SEE YOU EXECUTE THE "FLYING SWALLOW TURN" AGAIN!



"I LEARNED OF BATTLE FROM THE MASTERS OF WAR..."
TELL THESE OTHERS, CONAN-- WHAT IS BEST IN LIFE?
TO CRUSH YOUR ENEMIES! TO SEE THEM DRIVEN BEFORE YOU AND TO HEAR THE LAMENTATION OF THEIR WOMEN!
"I LEARNED OF LANGUAGES AND WRITING...
"AND, WHEN MY OWNER PUT ME TO STUD, I LEARNED THE LOVE OF WOMEN AS WELL.
"THEN, ONE NIGHT, THE EARTH GIANTS TREMBLED BENEATH THE FLOOR OF MY CELL!
CROM!
"THE VANIR WHO GUARDED ME WERE SLAIN, THEIR BODIES CRUSHED BY FALLEN ROCK...
"AND FREEDOM, SO LONG AN UNREMEMBERED DREAM--
"--WAS MINE--!!


"I FLED WILDLY ACROSS THE ICE-BOUND TUNDRA, PAST BARREN STANDS OF STUNTED SPRUCE...
"THE CLANKING OF MY SEVERED MANACLE CHAIN MINGLED IN THE FROSTY AIR--
"--WITH THE MENACING GROWLS OF PREDATORY WOLVES, THEIR EYES GLOWING LIKE HOT COALS IN THE GATHERING MURK.
"JUST AHEAD LAY A BOULDER-STREWN RISE, A GOOD PLACE TO TURN AND MAKE MY STAND...
"IN A FEW STRIDES, I REACHED IT! AND WHEN THE BOLDEST OF THE WOLVES LEAPED FORWARD TO TEST ME--
"--I GAVE HIM A GREETING HE WOULD NOT SOON FORGET!
"STILL, WITHOUT A REAL WEAPON, THERE WAS NO WAY I COULD HOPE TO REPEL AN ONSLAUGHT BY THE ENTIRE PACK. I BACKED AWAY, SEEKING SHELTER AMONG THE ROCKS...
"AND THEN--
CROM'S TEETH!
"--THE GROUND GAVE WAY BENEATH MY FEET, AND I FELL...
"WHILE ABOVE ME THE WOLVES SNARLED IN FRUSTRATION... AND WAITED!


"IN THE PITCH DARKNESS OF THE CAVE, I WITHDREW A FLINT AND STEEL FROM MY GIRDLE AND MADE A FIRE...
"ON THE WALLS WERE BOLD CARVINGS AND STRANGE SIGNS, THE LEAVINGS OF SOME LONG-FORGOTTEN RACE...
"...BUT THAT WAS NOT ALL THERE WAS!
"FOR ASTRIDE A HUGE THRONE SAT THE SKELETAL REMAINS OF A GIANT WARRIOR, SHEATHED IN COPPER ARMOR TARNISHED WITH AGE..."
"AND ACROSS HIS LAP LAY--
A SWORD! A MAGNIFICENT SWORD FIT FOR A GIANT!
AYE! BUT IT IS MY SWORD NOW!
AND THE FIRST USE TO WHICH I'LL PUT THE THING WILL BE TO FREE MYSELF FROM THIS CURSED CHAIN!
"WITH A SINGLE BLOW, I WAS FREE AND UNENCUMBERED...
"AND YET, NO SOONER DID I EMERGE FROM THE ANCIENT BURIAL CAVERN INTO THE DAYLIGHT--


"--THAN THE WOLVES ROSE FROM THEIR PATIENT VIGIL AND CLOSED IN FOR THE KILL...
"I RECALLED MY FATHER, TORN APART BY THE VANIR HOUNDS...
"HIS IMAGE REMAINED FIXED IN MY MIND'S EYE AS, ONE BY ONE, I SLEW THOSE WOLVES--
"--AND THEN STARTED ON MY WAY AGAIN, SWATHED IN A HEAVY CLOAK FASHIONED FROM THEIR PELTS.
"IT WAS DUSK WHEN I FOUND MYSELF AT THE EDGE OF A CLEARING...
"...FACING A HUT OF STONE AND SOD NESTLED AGAINST THE SIDE OF A SPRAWLING HILL...
"AND BESIDE THE DOORWAY, TETHERED BY CHAINS TO A TALL POST, KNELT THE FUR-ENSHROUDED FIGURE...
"SMOKE WAFTED FROM THE CHIMNEY IN THICK BLACK GOUTS...
THERE IS WARMTH IN FIRE, STRANGER! DO YOU NOT WISH TO WARM YOURSELF BY MY FIRE?


"AYE! THAT I DID! AND SO...
FROM THE NORTH, THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE FROM!
I AM CIMMERIAN!
YOU'RE A BARBARIAN SLAVE! DO YOU THINK I CAN'T TELL A SLAVE BY HIS EYES?
WHERE DO YOU GO, CIMMERIAN?
SOUTH. IT'S WARM THERE, AND THEY DON'T ASK QUESTIONS!
BAH! THEY SAID YOU'D COME! FROM THE NORTH... A MAN OF GREAT STRENGTH!
A CONQUEROR! A MAN WHO ONE DAY WOULD BE A KING BY HIS OWN HAND!
ONE WHO WOULD CRUSH THE SNAKES OF THE EARTH UNDER HIS BARED FEET!
SNAKES? DID YOU SAY... *SNAKES...?*
WHAT IS IT YOU SEEK, BARBARIAN?
A STANDARD... A SYMBOL... OF TWO SNAKES... FACING ONE ANOTHER.
OVER A BLACK SUN AND MOON? I CAN TELL YOU WHAT YOU WANT TO KNOW!
BUT FIRST YOU MUST LIE WITH ME, BARBARIAN, AND PAY MY...PRICE...!
IN ZAMORA, BARBARIAN... THE CROSSROADS OF THE WORLD! YOU CAN FIND WHAT YOU LOOK FOR IN... IN ZAMORA...! MMMM!


OHHH, BARBARIAN!
OHHHH!
UUUHHH!
ARRHHHH!
CROM'S THUNDER!
"THE WITCH-WOMAN SNARLED AND SLAVERED, HER STRENGTH OF A FIENDISH ORDER!
"FOR LONG, AGONIZING MOMENTS WE STRUGGLED...
"...UNTIL FINALLY I WRENCHED MYSELF FREE OF HER DEATH-GRIP--
"--AND HURLED HER HEADLONG INTO THE BLAZING HEARTH--
"--WHERE SHE EXPLODED IN A BLINDING BLAZE OF LIGHT!
CROM!


"A SPHERE OF CRIMSON FIRE SHOT FROM THE FIREPLACE, HOWLING AND CRACKLING...
"...AND VANISHED INTO THE STILLNESS OF THE STAR-DAPPLED NIGHT.
"DAWN WAS JUST BREAKING AS I PREPARED TO DEPART...
FOOD! GIVE ME FOOD SO THAT I WILL HAVE STRENGTH WHEN THE WOLVES COME! LET ME DIE NOT IN HUNGER-- BUT IN COMBAT!
WHO THE DEVIL ARE YOU?
I AM SUBOTAI, A HYRKANIAN THIEF AND ARCHER OF THE GREAT ORDER OF KERLAIT!
LIKE YOU, I STOPPED HERE, COLD AND HUNGRY. THE WITCH OFFERED ME SO MUCH-- WARMTH. I NEVER GOT PAST DINNER. THAT DAMNED WITCH TETHERED ME HERE AS DINNER FOR HER WOLVES!
"SOON...
THIEVERY... AN UNHEALTHY PROFESSION!
WHAT DO YOU DO?
I AM CONAN OF CIMMERIA, A SLAYER OF MEN!
MUCH MORE SANGUINE, BUT WITH A LIMITED FUTURE! YOU'RE TOO BIG TO BE A THIEF, ANYWAY.
WHERE DO WE GO, CIMMERIAN?
I AM HEADING SOUTH TO ZAMORA! FOR I'LL FIND WHAT I SEEK AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE WORLD!
GOOD!


"WE RAN... EVERYWHERE WE RAN. WE CROSSED THE GREAT STEPPE, RUNNING. HE TOLD ME HIS TALE AND I TOLD HIM MINE.
"HE SAID THAT TO BE A THIEF WAS TO LEARN TO RUN...
"AND FINALLY...
FROM HERE SOUTHWARD LIES ZAMORA! CIVILIZATION, ANCIENT AND WICKED!
HAVE YOU EVER SEEN CIVILIZATION, CONAN?
NO! LET'S WASTE NO TIME!
"WE ENTERED THE CITY AND WANDERED AMONG THE STALLS OF A CROWDED BAZAAR. SO THIS WAS ZAMORA, THE CROSSROADS OF THE WORLD. THERE WAS EVERYTHING THERE IF ONE COULD ONLY FIND IT.
"WE STOLE WHATEVER WE WANTED.
"SUDDENLY...
SUBOTAI! LISTEN!
DRUMS!
"AYE, DRUMS THERE WERE, AND OTHER INSTRUMENTS AS WELL. A STRANGE PROCESSION WOUND TOWARD US THROUGH THE NARROW, CROWD-CHOKED STREETS...
"MEN IN SOILED WHITE ROBES SWUNG POTS OF BURNING INCENSE, WHILE BEHIND THEM STRODE YOUTHS BEARING UNDULATING SNAKES...


"AND THEN A WOMAN PASSED OF SUCH HAUNTING, SPELLBINDING BEAUTY AS TO BE ALMOST BEYOND THE CAPACITY OF THE IMAGINATION TO CONCEIVE OF IT...
"I SWALLOWED HARD, TRANSFIXED BY HER LOVELINESS, MY EYES RIVETED ON HER LITHE AND SUPPLE FORM...
BEAUTIFUL, IS SHE NOT?
"FOR AN INSTANT, WE CAUGHT EACH OTHER'S GAZE... AND STARED...
YOU... WARRIOR! A CLEANSING IS COMING, A CLEANSING OF DOOM! THROW DOWN YOUR SWORD. SHED YOUR SKIN LIKE THE SERPENT AND, LIKE THE SERPENT YOU WILL BE RENEWED.
"AND THEN SHE DRIFTED AWAY LIKE A WISP OF CLOUD, AND WAS GONE...
"OTHER WHITE-ROBED MEN PASSED...
"VACANT-EYED FLAGELLANTS, WHO LASHED AT THEIR OWN BODIES WITH SNAKESKIN WHIPS--CHANTING--
DOOM!
RAMA... DOOM!
DOOM!
DOOM!
DOOM! IT'S THE SAME, LIKE OUT OF A DREAM-- A NIGHT-MARE.
BUT THEY ALL CHANT. THEY ARE FOOLS FOR RELIGION HERE.
ONE YEAR SNAKES, THE NEXT DOGS. EITHER WAY, IT'S ALWAYS DOOM! DOOM!
WHAT ELSE CAN THEY OFFER?
WHO WAS THAT GIRL, SUBOTAI? THE BEAUTIFUL ONE WITH THE SNAKE?
THAT WAS NO MERE GIRL, YOU FOOL! THAT WAS THE PRINCESS OF SHADIZAR!... A PRIESTESS OF SET.
SET'S FOLLOWERS ARE SAID TO BE DECEIVERS... MURDERERS. AND DEATH COULD WAIT BEHIND THOSE BEAUTIFUL EYES. PEOPLE ARE STRANGE HERE!


"NOR WAS THE COMELY PRINCESS THE ONLY SPELLBINDING WONDER OF ZAMORA'S CAPITAL CITY..."
BEHOLD THE TOWER OF THE SERPENT, CONAN! THE TOWER OF SET!
WITHIN, IT IS SAID, LIE DAZZLING RICHES AND JEWELS WITHOUT END!
AYE! AND AMONG THEM, THE GREATEST JEWEL OF ALL-- THE EYE OF THE SERPENT!
FOLLOW ME, THEN, HYRKANIAN! FOR I WOULD FEAST MY OWN EYES ON SOME OF THIS IMMENSE WEALTH!
"THE TOWER WAS SURROUNDED BY A GREAT WALL. WITHIN MINUTES WE HAD REACHED IT, AND...
BE CAREFUL, BARBARIAN! FOR IT IS NOT ONLY VAST WEALTH WHICH SET'S TOWER IS SAID TO CONTAIN...
...BUT ALSO SNAKES, MY FRIEND! A MULTITUDE OF SNAKES!
SHHH, HYRKANIAN! SOMETHING IS STIRRING AMID THE SHRUBBERY BESIDE THE TOWER!
BY BEL, BARBARIAN! I HEAR NOTHING!
BONES OF CROM!


I'LL BE A KUSHITE! YOU'RE NO GUARD!
NAY! AND NEITHER ARE YOU!
WHO ARE YOU, ANYWAY?
I AM CONAN, A CIMMERIAN!
WITH ME IS SUBOTAI, A THIEF AND ARCHER! WE TWO MEAN TO PLUNDER THIS PLACE!
HA! A PAIR OF FOOLS WHO LAUGH AT DEATH!
I AM VALERIA, QUEEN OF THIEVES!
I'VE HEARD OF YOU! BUT--WHERE ARE YOUR BRIGANDS?
COWARDS AND LACKEYS, ALL OF THEM! SCARED OF SET--AND OF THULSA DOOM!
DO YOU NOT FEAR THULSA DOOM, CIMMERIAN? THEY WORSHIP STRANGE GODS IN THERE!
THEY ARE NOT MY GODS!
DO YOU KNOW WHAT HORRORS LIE BEYOND THIS WALL?
NO!
GOOD! THEN YOU GO FIRST!
"WE CLIMBED BOLDLY UPWARD INTO THE NIGHT...


"FAR BELOW US IN THE MOONLIGHT, THE LIGHTS OF SHADIZAR TWINKLED LIKE STARS...
"THE EDGE OF THE TOWER RIM WAS FROSTED WITH JEWELS THAT SHIMMERED LIKE A THOUSAND RAINBOW LIGHTS...
"AND ON THE ROOF ITSELF, A DARK HOLE LIKE THAT OF A DEEP WELL.
"IT WAS LIKE AN ENDLESS CYLINDER DESCENDING INTO A PITCH-BLENDE VOID.
"A DEEP AND RESONANT CHANTING WAFTED UP TO US FROM FAR BELOW..."
LOOK, CIMMERIAN! A SHAFTLIKE OPENING FROM WHICH EMANATES A WEIRD GREENISH LIGHT!
I WILL SEE WHAT'S HERE!
YOU FIND OUT WHAT'S DOWN BELOW!
"AND SO WE CONTINUED OUR DESCENT INTO THE BLACKNESS.
"THE SHAFT'S FLOOR WAS LITTERED WITH ROTTING CORPSES.
"FAT-BELLIED RATS SCURRIED ABOUT IN THE CHARNEL GLOOM...


"WAN LIGHT BEAMED FROM A NARROW PASSAGEWAY. WE CRAWLED THROUGH IT WITH THE STEALTH OF SHADOWS...
"IT WAS ON THAT LEVEL OF THE TOWER THAT WE HAD LEFT THE THIEF-QUEEN, VALERIA...
"ABOVE US WE COULD HEAR THE VOICE OF YARO, THE HIGH PRIEST, WHOM VALERIA HAD TOLD US WAS SECOND IN POWER HERE ONLY TO THULSA DOOM HIMSELF. AND BEHIND YARO WE COULD HEAR THE DEEP, RHYTHMIC CHANT OF SET'S ACOLYTES...
"SUBOTAI AND I, MEANWHILE, HAD EMERGED ON THE LEVEL BELOW. LOOKING UPWARD, I COULD SEE A YOUNG GIRL PERCHED AT THE VERY BRINK OF THE YAWNING ABYSS. HER GAZE WAS FIXED, HYPNOTIC--
"AYE! AS THOUGH SHE HAD BEEN ENTRANCED... OR DRUGGED...!
"AND THEN I SAW IT--THE STRANGE ALTAR AGLOW WITH ELDRITCH FIRES AND WREATHED IN MISTS...
"AND AT ITS CENTER, BEDAZZLING AS THE BRIGHTNESS OF A HUNDRED SUNS--


"--LAY THE VERY JEWEL OF WHICH SUBOTAI HAD SPOKEN...
THE EYE OF THE--
--SER--
HUNH-!?!
CROM!!
"A SLUMBERING SERPENT, VASTER BY FAR THAN THE DENIZEN OF ANY NIGHT-MARE, LAY COILED SYMMETRICALLY AROUND THE STONE ALTARPIECE, THE ALTAR AND ITS GLEAMING GEM EN-CIRCLED TWICE 'ROUND BY ITS UNCTUOUS COILS..."
PSST! HYRKANIAN! HOLD MY SWORD!
AND, BY CROM, WE'LL SEE IF I CAN'T MANAGE TO PURLOIN THAT LITTLE BAUBLE--
--WITHOUT DISTURBING THE SLEEP OF THE LOATHSOME SLIME-THING THAT WATCHES OVER IT--!



"PADDING TOWARD THAT CURSED ALTAR LIKE A JUNGLE CAT, I ALLOWED THE WEIGHT OF MY BODY TO FALL SILENTLY FORWARD, CATCHING MYSELF WITH ONE HAND ON THE ALTAR'S EDGE...
"THE MUSCLES CORDED IN MY ARMS LIKE CABLES AS I REACHED OUT... FURTHER... AYE, AND FURTHER...
"...UNTIL FINALLY...
"...THE GLITTERING PRIZE LAY WITHIN MY GRASP...!
CROM TAKE ME! I'M SWEATING LIKE A... A...
...AN OPHIPEAN SWINE IN HEAT...!
"AYE--
"--THAT I WAS--!
THE BAUBLE'S OURS, SUBOTAI! NOW COME ON, MAN--
--AND LET'S--! CROM'S THUNDER! SUBOTAI! LOOK!
THERE ON THE ALTAR! IT'S THE SYMBOL THEY BORE ON THEIR STANDARDS WHEN THEY DESTROYED MY VILLAGE!
THE SYMBOL OF THE TWO SNAKES!


I THINK I'D BEST BORROW THIS BRONZE TRINKET--
--AND TUCK IT IN MY--
PSST! BEHIND YOU, CIMMERIAN!
KILL!
"AND NONE TOO SOON DID THE HYRKANIAN CRY OUT HIS WARNING!
"FOR THE SLUMBERING GUARDIAN OF SET'S ALTAR WAS ASLEEP NO MORE!
CROM'S THUNDER!
"FANGS ADRIP WITH VENOM, THE RAVENING REPTILE POISED FOR THE DEATH-STRIKE!
"BUT AS IT STRUCK, SO DID I, NAILING ITS GREAT JAWS SHUT WITH THE BLADE OF MY DAGGER!
"AND PRAISE CROM FOR THE HYRKANIAN!
"HIS AIM WAS TRUE!

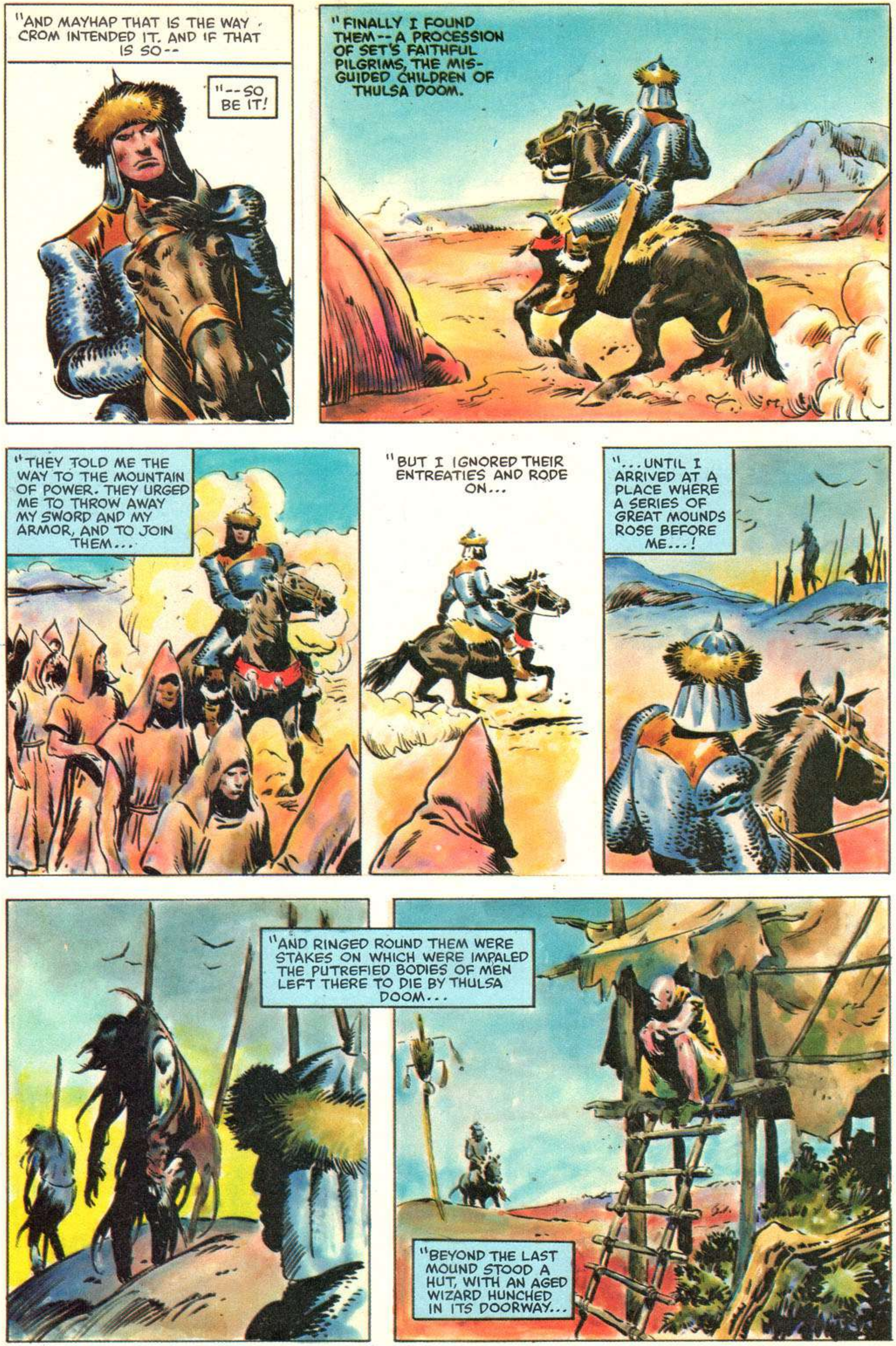


"AND YET, THOUGH IT WRITHED IN PAIN NOW, THE THING LIVED ON!
THESE DAMNED SLIMY COILS! I-I CAN'T BREAK FREE!
"IT LIVED ON, AND WAS IN THAT VERY INSTANT, WHIRLING ITS GREAT DIAMOND HEAD ROUND TO STRIKE AGAIN!
MY ARROWS ONLY ANNOY IT, BARBARIAN! YOU MUST SLAY IT WITH STEEL!
"AYE! STEEL! THAT'S WHAT WAS NEEDED, BY CROM!
"STEEL, AND A STRONG RIGHT ARM...!
"WHILE ON THE LEVEL ABOVE US...
LEAP, MY CHILD! INTO THE BECKONING COILS OF SET!
I LIVE ONLY TO DO YOUR BIDDING... O PRIEST...!
HEH HEHHHH! OF COURSE YOU DO, MY CHILD! OF COURSE YOU--
EEEEEEE
BY THE FANGS OF SET!


DEAD! SET'S GREAT GUARDIAN SERPENT IS... IS DEAD...!
LOOK! INFIDELS DOWN BELOW US, FLEEING THROUGH THAT ARCHWAY!
KILL THEM! KILL THE INFIDELS!
FASTER, BOTH OF YOU! CLIMB FASTER! WE'VE GOT TO REACH THE TOWER ROOF BEFORE YARO'S HOWLING HORDES DO!
WE'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO CLIMB DOWN IN TIME, GIRL! THOSE DAMNED REPTILE WORSHIPPERS ARE RIGHT BEHIND US!
THEN FORGET CLIMBING!
A POOL GLISTENS BELOW US! WE'LL HAVE TO --
-- JUMP--!!
"THE MOON SHONE RICH AND FULL ON OUR BODIES AS WE CLEAVED THE WATER LIKE KNIVES...
"WE SURFACED, ALL OF US, EXULTING IN THE DARING OF OUR EVENING'S EXPLOIT...


"AYE, WE EXULTED. AND AFTERWARD, WE CELEBRATED...
AND WHAT WILL YOU BUY, SUBOTAI, WITH YOUR SHARE OF OUR NEW-FOUND WEALTH?
HA! I WILL BUY GIRLS, CONAN! SLEEK GIRLS, WITH SHINY SKIN AND ROUND HIPS!
AND WHAT OF YOU, MY FRIEND? WILL YOU ALSO BUY GIRLS?
NAY, HYRKANIAN! FOR WHY SHOULD A MAN BUY THAT WHICH HE ALREADY HAS?
AYE! AND INDEED WHY SHOULD A MAN BUY ANYTHING AT ALL IF HE'S AS PRACTICED AT THIEVERY AS YOU THREE SCUM!
HUH-!?
"SOON..."
THESE ARE THE THIEVES OF THE TOWER, SIRE!
BAH! WHAT DARING! WHAT INSOLENCE!
WHAT UNBRIDLED ARROGANCE YOU THREE HAVE EXHIBITED!
FROM THE UNPLUMBED DEPTHS OF MY SOUL, I, KING OSRIC OF ZAMORA, SALUTE YOU ALL!
FOR WHILE EVEN MY FIERCEST WARRIORS SLINK CRAVENLY FROM THEIR DUTY, ONLY YOU THREE HAVE DARED TO DEFY THAT FOULEST OF FOUL DEMIGODS, THULSA DOOM!
ALAS! EVEN MY OWN DAUGHTER HAS FALLEN UNDER THAT DEMON'S SPELL!


AYE, BARBARIAN! EVEN AS WE SPEAK, MY BELOVED DAUGHTER TRAVELS EAST TO THULSA DOOM AND HIS CURSED MOUNTAIN OF POWER! FOR SOON THE FIEND INTENDS TO MAKE HER... HIS!
I HAVE SUMMONED YOU HERE BECAUSE I WANT YOU THREE TO STEAL MY DAUGHTER BACK FOR ME!
SLAVE! POUR THE STONES!
AT YOUR COMMAND, SIRE!
AYE! THEY ARE RUBIES! TAKE ALL YOU CAN CARRY!
TAKE ENOUGH OF THEM TO BECOME KINGS YOURSELVES!
ONLY SWEAR TO ME THAT YOU WILL BRING MY DAUGHTER BACK!
CONAN?
"THE SUN HAD BARELY RISEN OVER THE CRAGGY ZAMORIAN BUTTES AS I SPURRED MY MOUNT EASTWARD TOWARD THE MOUNTAIN OF POWER...
"BEHIND ME, IN SHADIZAR, I HAD LEFT VALERIA, AYE, AND ALSO SUBOTAI...
"FOR HOW COULD I ASK THEM TO SHARE MY VENGE-FUL QUEST WHEN THEY COULD SCARCELY EVEN FATHOM MY NEED TO PURSUE IT?


"AND MAYHAP THAT IS THE WAY CROM INTENDED IT. AND IF THAT IS SO--
"--SO BE IT!
"FINALLY I FOUND THEM--A PROCESSION OF SET'S FAITHFUL PILGRIMS, THE MIS-GUIDED CHILDREN OF THULSA DOOM.
"THEY TOLD ME THE WAY TO THE MOUNTAIN OF POWER. THEY URGED ME TO THROW AWAY MY SWORD AND MY ARMOR, AND TO JOIN THEM...
"BUT I IGNORED THEIR ENTREATIES AND RODE ON...
"...UNTIL I ARRIVED AT A PLACE WHERE A SERIES OF GREAT MOUNDS ROSE BEFORE ME...!
"AND RINGED ROUND THEM WERE STAKES ON WHICH WERE IMPALED THE PUTREFIED BODIES OF MEN LEFT THERE TO DIE BY THULSA DOOM...
"BEYOND THE LAST MOUND STOOD A HUT, WITH AN AGED WIZARD HUNCHED IN ITS DOORWAY...


IS IT YOU WHO CARES FOR THESE STRANGE MOUNDS, OLD ONE?
I SING TO THEM, WARRIOR! OF BATTLES AND HEROES, RICHES AND WOMEN!
GREAT KINGS ARE BURIED WITHIN THOSE MOUNDS!
NO ONE BOTHERS ME HERE! NOT EVEN THULSA DOOM!
THIS THULSA DOOM... DO YOU KNOW HIM WELL?
NO MAN KNOWS HIM WELL! YOU'VE NOT COME HERE AS A PILGRIM, HAVE YOU, MY SON?
FOR THERE IS EVIL ON THAT MOUNTAIN! THEY ARE ALL DECEIVERS THERE! DECEIVERS!
"WE TALKED TOGETHER THROUGH THE NIGHT...
"AND THE FOLLOWING MORNING, AS THE SUN ROSE...
KEEP THE BLADE WELL-OILED, WIZARD! AND FEED THE HORSE!
"AND WITH THOSE WORDS I TOOK MY LEAVE OF THE OLD ONE--
"--AND WENT OFF TO JOIN THE THRONGS OF CHANTING PILGRIMS TRUDGING ALONG THE THE STEEP, ROCKY ROAD THAT WOUND THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN OF POWER TOWARD THE SHRINE OF DOOM...
DO YOU NEED MY HELP, PILGRIM?
YES, PRIESTESS!


WHERE CAN I SEE THE MASTER?
FROM THERE PILGRIM!
FROM WITHIN THE HALLOWED CONFINES OF SET'S GREAT TEMPLE, THULSA DOOM, OUR MASTER, WILL SHORTLY SPEAK TO US ALL!
THANK YOU, PRIESTESS!
MAY THE WAYS OF SET BE YOUR WAYS, PILGRIM!
WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING, BROTHER?
ARE YOU A PRIEST?
THAT I AM, BROTHER!
I HAVE DOUBTS... FEARS. PERHAPS WE CAN DISCUSS THEM TOGETHER, OVER HERE! ALONE!
WHY, YES, BROTHER, OF COURSE!
AND YOUR ROBE! IS IT A PRIEST'S ROBE?
WHY, YES! OF --
GOOD!
UNNHHHH!
"NOW DISGUISED IN PRIESTLY RAIMENT--
"--I MINGLED WITH THE OTHER PRIESTS FILING SILENTLY INTO THULSA DOOM'S FORBIDDING HOUSE OF WORSHIP...


"AS EACH NEARED THE ENTRANCE, HE SHOWED THE GUARD A BRONZE MEDALLION VERY LIKE THE ONE WHICH I HAD STOLEN FROM SET'S TOWER IN ZAMORA...
"AND SO, WHEN MY TURN CAME, I SHOWED THEM MY MEDALLION...
"THE GUARDS DID NOT SPEAK--
"--BUT RATHER, IN A KIND OF BESTIAL SIGN LANGUAGE, BADE ME PASS...
"MY RUSE APPEARED TO HAVE SUCCEEDED...
"BUT, ALAS, IN MY AGE AS IN ANY OTHER, THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS AS THEY SEEM!
"MEANWHILE, IN THE HEART OF THE AMPHITHEATER, THE EYES OF THE FAITHFUL WERE ALL RIVETED ON ONE MAN--THE HYPNOTICALLY CAPTIVATING FIGURE OF--
"--THULSA DOOM--!!"
THE DAY OF DOOM IS SOON AT HAND, CHILDREN!
THE DAY WHEN I WILL COMMAND YOU TO STRIKE DOWN THE PARENTS AND LEADERS WHO HAVE LIED TO YOU AND LED YOU ASTRAY!
THE DAY WHEN YOUR DAGGERS WILL LASH OUT TO DESTROY THOSE PATHETIC, TRUSTING FOOLS... WHO HAVE ATTEMPTED TO DECEIVE ALL OF YOU...
...EVEN AS THAT FOUL INFIDEL THERE HAS ATTEMPTED TO DECEIVE ME!
PUNISH HIM!


"IN THE NEXT SOUL-NUMBING INSTANT, A SCORE OF MAILED HANDS DESCENDED--
GNNGHH!
"--A SILKEN RUMAL SLIPPED ROUND MY NECK AND SNAPPED IT BACK--
"--THEN THE ROOM SPUN CRAZILY AND ALL THE WORLD WENT BLACK!
IN ZAMORA YOU BROKE INTO MY HOUSE, STOLE MY PROPERTY, SLEW MY PETS!
YOU KILLED MY SNAKE--WHICH WE RAISED FROM THE TIME IT WAS BORN. IT WAS ALMOST TWENTY YEARS OLD!
TELL ME WHY, INFIDEL? WHAT POSSESSED YOU TO DO SUCH HATEFUL THINGS TO ME?
IF ONLY CROM HAD...GRANTED ME A MINUTE LONGER...I WOULD HAVE KILLED YOU TOO...!
MY, MY! SUCH HATRED!
YOU KILLED MY FATHER AND MOTHER! YOU TOOK MY FATHER'S ...SWORD...!
IT MUST HAVE BEEN WHEN I WAS YOUNGER! FOR THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I SEARCHED FOR THE RIDDLE OF STEEL--WHEN I HAD NOT YET LEARNED THE ANSWER. I'LL TELL YOU IT NOW, BOY--IT IS THE LEAST I CAN DO.
STEEL ISN'T STRONG--FOR WHAT IS STEEL COMPARED TO THE HAND THAT WIELDS IT?
YOU CONDEMNED ME TO THE VANIR WHEEL OF PAIN...
YES--AND LOOK WHAT IT MADE OF YOU! THE STRENGTH OF YOUR BODY--THE WILL IN YOUR EYES--THE DESIRE IN YOUR HEART! I GAVE YOU THIS...AND SUCH A WASTE!
YOU MAY CONTEMPLATE ALL THESE THINGS ON THE TREE OF WOE, MY BOY!
REXOR! CRUCIFY HIM!


"ON THE DESOLATE, WEATHERED PLAIN BEYOND THE MOUNTAIN OF POWER, THEY NAILED ME TO THE TREE OF WOE...
"THE TREE WAS STARK AND BLACK, LIKE A CHARRED BONE--ITS TWISTED SPIRES CLUTCHING UP LIKE SKELETONS INTO THE BURNING, ORANGE SKY...
"BENEATH ME, THE GROUND SHIMMERED LIKE HEATED IRON...
"ABOVE ME, THE SUN GLOWERED DOWN LIKE A DEMON'S EYE!
"THE VULTURES DIPPED AND DRIFTED IN THE WINDLESS SKY, WAITING...
"AYE, WAITING FOR ME TO DIE!
"NOR WOULD THEY NEED TO KEEP THEIR MORBID VIGIL MUCH LONGER, FOR I KNEW I WOULD NOT SURVIVE TO GREET ANOTHER DAWN...
"AND THEN SUDDENLY, FROM AMID THE RIPPLING WAVES OF HEAT, A FORM AROSE...
"'TWAS THE FORM OF A MAN, RUNNING EFFORTLESSLY ACROSS THE VAST RED LANDSCAPE, INDIFFERENT TO THE HARSH TERRAIN OR THE BROILING HEAT OF THE SUN...
"I KNEW OF ONLY ONE BREED OF MAN IN THE WORLD THAT COULD RUN THAT WAY-- A HYRKANIAN STEPPE DWELLER...
"AND PRAISE CROM, I WAS RIGHT! IT WAS SUBOTAI!


"THAT NIGHT, NOT FAR FROM THE OLD MAN'S HUT..."
HE SAID YOU WERE A WIZARD!
IF THE GODS OWE YOU ANY FAVORS, BID THEM REPAY THEIR DEBT THIS NIGHT!
BID THEM HEAL THE HAND THAT WIELDS THE SWORD OF VENGEANCE!
THERE ARE DANGERS, GIRL, THOUGH I SEE YOU CARE LITTLE FOR THOSE!
BUT BE FORE-WARNED! THE SPIRITS OF THIS PLACE EXACT A HEAVY TOLL!
THEN I WILL PAY THE TOLL! NOW BEND TO YOUR WORK, SORCERER!
"THE WIZARD METHODICALLY PAINTED FIGURES OF AN ANCIENT UNKNOWN LANGUAGE ON MY FACE AS VALERIA AND SUBOTAI WATCHED..."
SOMETIME TONIGHT THE SPIRITS WILL TRY TO TAKE HIM. IF THEY SUCCEED...
...THEN YOU WILL FOLLOW!
"THE WIZARD KNELT, LOST IN CHANTING AND DEEP MEDITATION...
"AND THEN, ALL AT ONCE, HE THREW UP HIS HANDS AND SCREAMED--
"--AND RAN OFF SHRIEKING INTO THE NIGHT--!!"
THE CIMMERIAN! HIS BODY IS TWITCHING AND HEAVING AND... WRACKED WITH STRANGE SPASMS!
IT IS AS THOUGH GIANT HANDS WERE REACHING FOR HIM FROM THE BEYOND, TRY-ING TO CLAIM HIM!
BEGONE, DAMN YOU, DEMONS! BEGONE! YOU'LL NOT TAKE HIM FROM ME!


THE GIRL HAS WON! THEY'RE GONE!
THE SPIRITS ARE GONE!
AYE, WIZARD! FOR MY LOVE IS STRONGER THAN ANY DEATH COULD BE!
E'EN THE GODS CANNOT SEVER US, CONAN! WERE I DEAD, AND YOU STILL FIGHTING FOR LIFE, I'D RETURN FROM THE VERY PIT OF HELL TO FIGHT AT YOUR SIDE!
YOU MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT!
"THE OLD WIZARD HAD DONE HIS HEALING WORK WORK WELL, FOR ONLY A FAINT DISCOLORATION REMAINED TO MARK THE PLACES WHERE THE SPIKES HAD BEEN...
"AS I TOOK UP MY MIGHTY SWORD AGAIN, I BEGAN TO PONDER THE VENGEANCE THAT WOULD SOON BE MINE...
"VENGEANCE ON THE HATED THULSA DOOM!
"AND A SHORT WHILE LATER...
THE WIZARD SAYS THE MOUNTAIN OF POWER IS HOLLOW!
A GOOD THIEF COULD GET IN THERE AND MAKE OFF WITH THE PRINCESS BEFORE SHE WAS MISSED!
GOOD THIEVES COULD DO THAT! BUT NOT VENGEFUL ONES!
WE'LL STEAL THE GIRL, NOTHING MORE! WE CAN KILL THULSA DOOM ANOTHER DAY!
IS IT AGREED, THEN, CONAN? JUST THE GIRL?
"IMPASSIVELY I NODDED, BUT I SAID NOTHING...



"'TWAS NIGHTFALL BY THE TIME WE REACHED THE GREAT RIVER-FILLED GORGE THAT GASHED THE EARTH LIKE A RAGGED SCAR BEHIND THE MOUNTAIN OF POWER--
"--AND PICKED OUR WAY UP THE MASSIVE CLIFFS--
"--TO THE MOUTH OF A GREAT CAVE LIGHTED BY THE GLOW OF A HOT FIRE BURNING WITHIN IT...!
"AND THE SIGHT THAT CONFRONTED US WHEN AT LAST WE ENTERED THAT PLACE--
"--IT WAS A SCENE FROM OUT OF HELL ITSELF!
"BEFORE US STRETCHED A VAST, CAVERN AND AT ITS CENTER, A GREAT ROCK CAULDRON BUBBLED!


TROLLS!
NO! LONG AGO THERE WERE TWO RACES--MEN--AND THE SHADOW DWELLERS. MEN MOVED INTO THE LIGHT, AND THEY--
--THEY LIVE ON HUMAN FLESH! DOOM MUST BREED THEM!
SO THOSE ARE THE FIENDS DOOM KEEPS TO PROTECT THOSE HE CALLS HIS "CHILDREN"!
SOME OF THOSE "CHILDREN" APPEAR TO BE THEIR DINNER!
SHH! LOOK BEYOND THAT ENTRANCEWAY!
IT IS THE CHAMBER OF THULSA DOOM HIMSELF!
"AND THE GIRL, UNDULATING BEFORE HIM--IT'S KING OSRIC'S DAUGHTER, YASIMINA, THE PRINCESS OF SHADIZAR!"
"AND THEN, AS WE WATCHED, OUR FASCINATION WAS TRANSMUTED INTO BLOOD-CHILLING HORROR--
"--AS WE SAW THE ARCHFIEND THULSA DOOM TRANSFORM HIMSELF INTO THE VERY IMAGE OF--
SET, THE SERPENT GOD!
COME, CIMMERIAN!
LET'S DO THE THING WE'VE COME TO DO--
--SO THAT WE CAN BE AWAY FROM THIS FOUL PLACE--!!
OHHHH! THE CURTAIN! I-IT'S ON FIRE!


"AS THE GREAT CLOUDS OF BLACK SMOKE BILLOWED THROUGH THE CHAMBER, WE EACH OF US UNLEASHED OUR WEAPONS AND WE CHARGED...
"THREE OF DOOM'S SNARLING BEAST MEN SPRANG FORWARD TO BLOCK OUR PATH--
"--AND I HACKED MY WAY PAST THEM WITH FLASHING STEEL!
GGH
AAR
HELP ME, MY LORD DOOM! HELP ME!
STOP SCREAMING, WENCH! YOU'RE COMING WITH US!
SUBOTAI! VALERIA! YOU GO AHEAD! I'LL FOLLOW!
"WITHIN MOMENTS...
THE CLIMBING ROPE'S SECURE! IT LEADS TO THE RIVER!
FASTER, ALL OF YOU!
ONE OF DOOM'S DAMNED APE-MEN IS HACKING AWAY AT OUR ROPE UP THERE!


CROM!
FORTUNATELY, BY THE TIME HE'D CUT IT THROUGH, WE ONLY HAD EIGHT OR NINE CUBITS LEFT TO FALL!
"AND YET AT THAT VERY INSTANT, ON THE STONY LEDGE HIGH ABOVE...
YARO! THE BOW!
YES, MASTER!
THE TWISTING VIPER WILL MAKE ME A DEADLIER ARROW THAN ANY FEATHERED SHAFT!
DEATH TO THEM ALL!
DEATH TO THE INFIDELS!
AHH!
VALERIA!! NO--PLEASE, NO!
THE WIZARD...! I-I TOLD HIM... I WOULD PAY... THE GODS...!


"SHE GASPED IN PAIN AS I PULLED THE LIVING SERPENT-ARROW FROM HER BODY AND HURLED THE HISSING VIPER INTO THE FROTHING WHITE WATER OF THE RIVER...
KISS ME... CONAN...! LET ME BREATHE MY LAST BREATH... INTO YOUR MOUTH...!
I'M SO COLD... CONAN...! KEEP ME...
...WARM...
"ATOP THE GREAT MOUND NEAR THE WIZARD'S HUT, WE LAY VALERIA TO HER FINAL REST ON A PYRE OF DRIED WOOD...
"EVEN IN DEATH, SHE WAS GLORIOUSLY BEAUTIFUL..."
WHY DO YOU CRY FOR HER, HYRKANIAN?
HE IS CONAN, A CIMMERIAN! HE CANNOT CRY, SO I CRY FOR HIM!
"THE SMOKE FROM HER PYRE DID NOT DISSIPATE, BUT ROSE STRAIGHT UP INTO THE STARRY SKY...


"AND AT DAWN..."
ENJOY THIS NEW DAY WHILE YOU CAN, WARRIOR, FOR IT WILL BE YOUR LAST!
THULSA DOOM HAS SEEN YOUR FIRE AND HE WILL COME FOR ME WHEN THE SUN SETS! AND WHEN HE DOES--
--HE WILL KILL YOU--!!
I WAS BORN ON A BATTLEFIELD, GIRL! THE FIRST SOUND I HEARD WAS A SCREAM!
LOOK, CONAN! SUBOTAI! I'VE BROUGHT YOU WEAPONS, SHIELDS, ARMOR FOR YOUR COMING BATTLE WITH THE MEN OF THULSA DOOM!
HEY, OLD MAN! WHERE DID YOU FIND THESE THINGS?
FROM THE DEAD MEN IMPALED ABOUT THE MOUNDS! THEY WON'T NEED THEM!
THE GODS ARE PLEASED WITH YOU! THEY WILL WATCH THE BATTLE!
WILL THEY HELP US, OLD ONE?
NO!
THEN TELL THEM TO STAY OUT OF OUR WAY!


"WE PASSED WHAT LITTLE TIME REMAINED TO US DIGGING TRENCHES AND PREPARING TRAPS LINED WITH SHARPENED BAMBOO STAKES..."
WHAT WILL HAPPEN NOW?
WAR, OLD MAN! WAR AS YOU'VE NEVER KNOWN IT!
"AND SOON THEY CAME, DOOM'S MEN, TWENTY IRON-PLATED HORSEMEN, BLACK AND FEARSOME AGAINST THE BROODING SKY...
"WE TOOK COVER AMID THE MOUNDS BEHIND HUGE STONE SLABS, AND BRACED OURSELVES FOR THEIR ATTACK...
I'VE NEVER PRAYED TO YOU BEFORE, CROM, BUT NOW I ASK THAT YOU GRANT ME ONE REQUEST!
GRANT ME JUST ONE THING, CROM!
GRANT ME--
--REVENGE--!!



HAVE A FREE SPEAR, DOG! I HAVE PLENTY OF SPARE ONES!
"THE HORSEMAN CRASHED FROM HIS MOUNT, SCREAMING IN AGONY...
"...EVEN AS TWO MORE OF DOOM'S SLAYERS THUNDERED DOWN ON ME...!
"THE OUTCOME OF THIS BATTLE DID NOT REALLY MATTER. I KNEW THAT.
"ALL THAT MATTERED WAS THAT ON THIS DAY TWO MEN HAD STOOD AGAINST MANY, AND SHOWN VALOR!
HA! THAT GOT YOU, YOU WORTHLESS MAGGOT!
"THE BLOW CLANGED SAVAGELY AGAINST MY HELMET AND SENT ME REELING GROUNDWARD...
"I AWOKE TO HOOVES THUNDERING DOWN UPON ME...
...AND WHIRLING, I DOVE FOR THE SHELTER OF THE CLOSEST PIT!
"THE HORSEMAN WHO FOLLOWED SO HARD UPON MY HEELS, HOWEVER--"
WHOAA, DAMN YOU! WHOAAA!


"--FOLLOWED ME TO HIS DOOM--!!
AARRHHH!
THAT WAS DEFTLY DONE, BARBARIAN!
DEFTLY DONE INDEED!
REXOR!
AYE, INFIDEL! REXOR...
...WHO NAILED YOUR WORTHLESS CARCASS TO THE TREE OF WOE...
...WHO NOW DISARMS YOU--


--AND WHO WILL NOW DERIVE THE UTMOST SATISFACTION--
--FROM DISEMBOWELING--!
FANGS OF SET! A MIGHTY SWORD ARM FROM OUT OF NOWHERE! STAYING MY DEATH STROKE!
BLAST ME FOR A MADMAN! IT'S--
--VALERIA--!!
AND DID YOU DOUBT ME, THEN, CONAN--
--WHEN I HELD YOU IN MY ARMS AND SWORE THAT E'EN THE GODS COULD NEVER SEVER US?
AAAHHH! MY... MY EYES...!
"IN THAT BAREST FRACTION OF AN INSTANT, I LUNGED FOR MY FALLEN SWORD...
VALERIA! SHE'S GONE!
AYE, BARBARIAN! GONE! LEAVING YOU AT MY MERCY!
FOR AS THULSA DOOM IS MY LORD AND MASTER--
"BUT NO SOONER HAD I WHIRLED TO FACE REXOR ONCE AGAIN THAN I SAW THAT--


--NOW THAT MY EYES ARE ONCE MORE CLEAR OF THAT WITCH'S SPELL, I'LL CARVE YOU INTO--
NAY, REXOR! YOUR CARVING DAYS ARE AT AN END!
THIS BLOW IS FOR MY MOTHER!
UNNHHH!
AND THIS, FOR MY FATHER!
UNNHHH!
AND THIS IS FOR ME!
"SO NOW REXOR WAS DEAD--
"--AND ONLY THE MOST HATED OF MY MORTAL ENEMIES YET REMAINED TO FACE MY VENGEANCE--
NO, MY LORD! NO!
THULSA DOOM!!
PLEASE FREE ME! DON'T LEAVE ME HERE, MY LORD! DON'T LEAVE ME, MY FATHER!
FEAR NOT, MY BELOVED! YOUR MASTER WOULD NEVER ABANDON YOU TO THE CLUTCHES OF THESE INFIDELS!


'TWILL TAKE BUT ONE OF MY SERPENT SHAFTS TO--
OHHHHH!
NO--!!
PRAISE THE GODS!
'TWAS NOT EXACTLY THE GODS WHO SAVED YOUR TENDER HIDE, PRINCESS!
AYE, PRINCESS! YOUR BELOVED MASTER WOULD HAVE KILLED YOU JUST NOW! AND NOW I MUST KILL HIM AND YOU MUST WITNESS IT!
YOU WILL UNDERSTAND-- SOMEDAY, WHEN YOU ARE A QUEEN!
AH, NO, MY CHILD! YOU WILL NOT KILL ME, FOR WHAT SON WOULD KILL HIS OWN FATHER? AND WHO IS YOUR FATHER IF IT IS NOT ME?
WAS IT NOT YOUR HATRED FOR ME WHICH GAVE YOU THE WILL TO ENDURE WHEN YOU TOILED ENDLESSLY ON THE WHEEL OF PAIN?
I AM THE WELLSPRING FROM WHICH YOU FLOW! WHEN I AM GONE, YOU WILL HAVE NEVER BEEN!
WHAT COULD YOUR WORLD POSSIBLY BE WITHOUT ME?
MY SON!


MY SO... NNNGGHHHH...!
YOU...YOU WOULD KILL YOUR OWN...
...FATHER?...
"THULSA DOOM WAS RIGHT.
"THE ANSWER WAS NOT IN THE BLADE, BUT IN THE MAN...
"MY FATHER WAS THE LIGHT OF DAY. THULSA DOOM WAS MY NIGHT...
"AS FOR DOOM'S SO-CALLED CHILDREN, THEY WERE NOW SO MANY ORPHANS. BUT NOW, LIKE MYSELF, THEY WERE FREE AT LAST..."
WHERE WILL YOU GO NOW, MY FRIEND?
NORTH AND EAST! AND YOU?
SOUTH AND WEST!
WE WILL MEET AGAIN AT THE GATE OF HELL!
FIN

FROM HYBORIA to HOLLY-WOOD

articles and interviews by DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT

In an age undreamed of, when shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars, hither came—

CONAN



Conan! The name instantly conjures images—dark images, powerful images, images of a world that feels, perhaps uncomfortably, like our own dim past and yet is truly like nothing we have ever experienced before. It is a world of terror and triumph, of cruelty and survival, of magic and cunning—a world of the powerful and the *more* powerful!

It is not always simple to isolate a single cause for one character's phenomenal popularity. Many forces come into play, and some of those may be deeply hidden. Conan is a lone warrior, a barbarian living by sword and wit, yet he is by no means that simple. There is a genuine depth and complexity in the character and his world that speaks in some way to almost anyone who encounters him.

To those who enjoy high fantasy in whatever form (books, comics, television or film), Conan has become a modern mythology that informs us about ourselves, including our darker nature. It is, perhaps, this element that has made Conan the barbarian, the thief, reaver, slayer, warrior, and future King a true immortal!

While it is true that Conan is essentially synonomous with the term "heroic fantasy," his presentation, the creation of his world, has exclusively been the domain of the printed page. He has been immortalized in the writings of his creator, fantasy writer Robert E. Howard, first in magazines during the nineteen thirties, then in book collections from the nineteen sixties forward. Many of those book volumes were adorned by paintings executed by Frank Frazetta. Frazetta, one of the most distinguished fantasy illustrators alive today, most vividly visualized Howard's world. Frazetta in many ways determined how future illustrators would look at the Cimmerian and his world.

Finally, in 1970, Conan blazed his way into the world of comics (and, we modestly add, took it overwhelmingly by storm)! Many fine illustrators and writers honed these images of the world Robert E. Howard created, always striving to remain true to Howard's original concepts. For those who became involved, it was always a labor of love. And, slowly, the legend grew.

But, always on the printed page!

This latest great stride in the career of the wandering Cimmerian was, if not inevitable, certainly predictable. Conan has made the heady leap from printed page to giant screen. If you have not yet seen the movie, the super special you now hold in your hands should have more than whetted your appetite. Needless to say, everyone involved has knocked themselves out to capture the scope and the granduer of the big screen production. If you *have* seen the movie, you know that there's an added thrill in seeing Conan and his world brought to life by nothing less than the sheer wizardry of Hollywood artistry and technology.

That should come as a surprise to no one, considering the impressive roster of actors, athletes, production people and technicians. You are probably familiar with most of them—people like Arnold Schwarzenegger, John Milius, Dino DeLaurentiis,Ron Cobb, James Earl Jones and others. If you aren't, you soon will be, as we take you on a special behind-the-scenes visit with some of the folks who helped bring the film into being.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS
The Creation of Conan The Barbarian

Before we rush headlong into the glittering world of film magic, it would be negligent if we did not look back at the beginnings which made it all possible

It was the 1930s. In America, caught up in the midst of the great depression, scores of thick but inexpensive fiction magazines (called *pulps* because of the newsprint-type pulp paper they were printed on) proliferated on the newsstands. These magazines were devoted to *genre* stories. Here were detectives, spacemen, cowboys—all taking on evil in its darkest forms. It was an era that, not unlike our own, needed heroes.

One particular magazine became especially popular. It was called *Weird Tales*. In the pages of this magazine, people were first introduced to H. P. Lovecraft, August Dereleth, Lord Dunsany and Robert E. Howard. The latter, in a story called "The Phoenix on the Sword," introduced many people for the first time to Conan of Cimmeria. The character was an instant success with the magazine's regular readership. In the space of a mere four years, Howard wrote seventeen Conan stories for *Weird Tales* (including one novel, which was serialized over several issues).

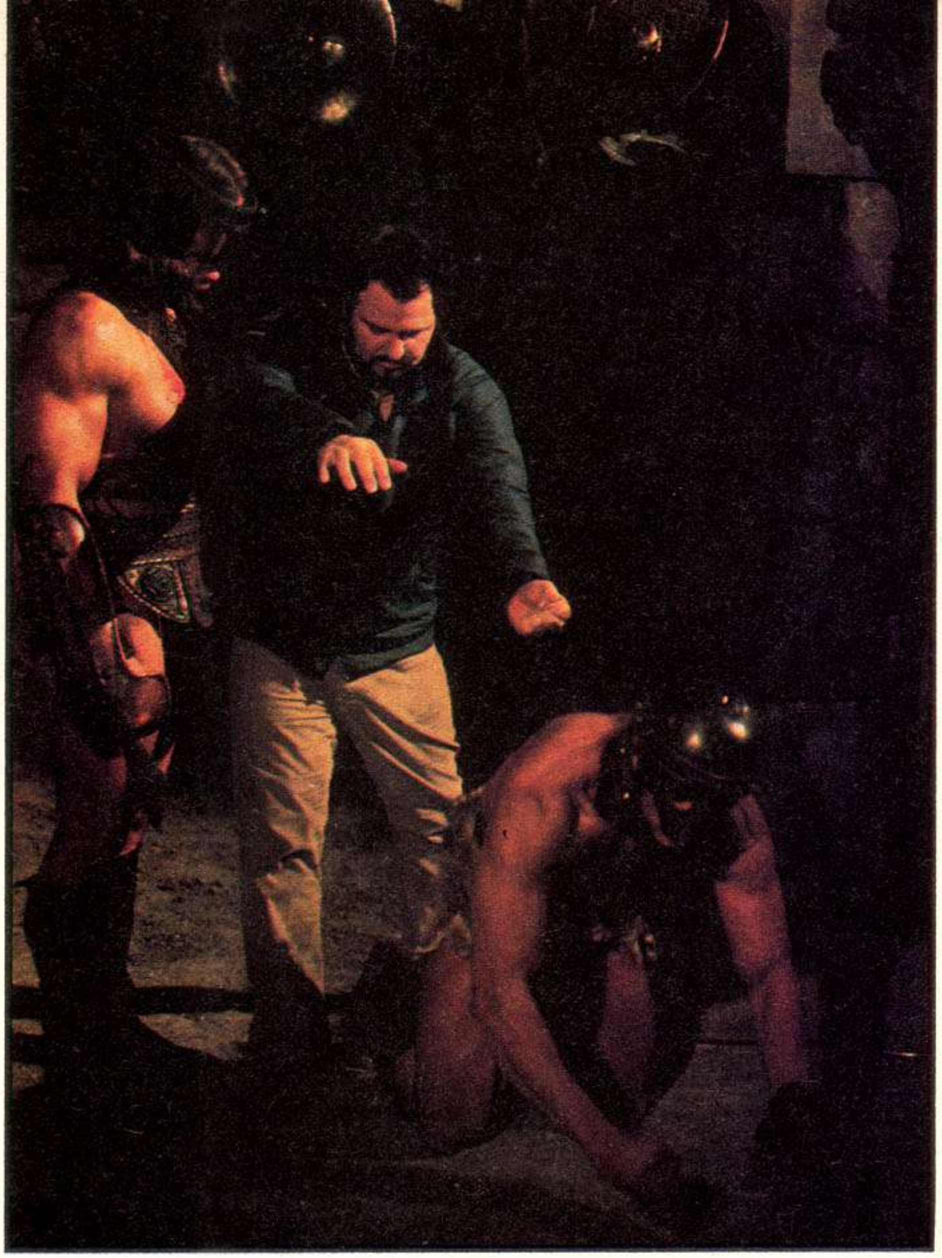
> "Conan lay still, enduring the weight of his chains and the despair of his position with the stoicism of the wilds that had bred him. He did not move, because the jangle of his chains, when he shifted his body, sounded startlingly loud in the darkness and stillness, and it was his instinct, born of a thousand wilderness-bred ancestors, not to betray his position in his helplessness. This did not result from a logical reasoning process . . . the instincts of the wild were there . . ."
>
> —from *Hour of the Dragon* by Robert E. Howard

Conan was not the only hero created by Howard. His other heroes were quite popular too—King Kull, Solomon Kane, Amra, Bran Mak Morn and others. But none captivated readers in quite the same way that Conan did.

This was also true for Howard, himself. He often remarked that the Conan stories very nearly wrote themselves. The first Conan tale, he claimed, emerged virtually full blown, almost spontaneously, as if it had been first crystallized in the depths of his own unconscious. It was as if, he once remarked, the Cimmerian stood behind him, relating these adventures and that he (Howard) were merely a conduit, a chronicler.

Because of this quality, Howard also felt that Conan had the greatest depth of any of his characters, the most humanity. It was this very thing that seemed to fire the imagination of Conan's many readers, both when the stories were first printed and, later, when they were anthologized in book form.

DAK



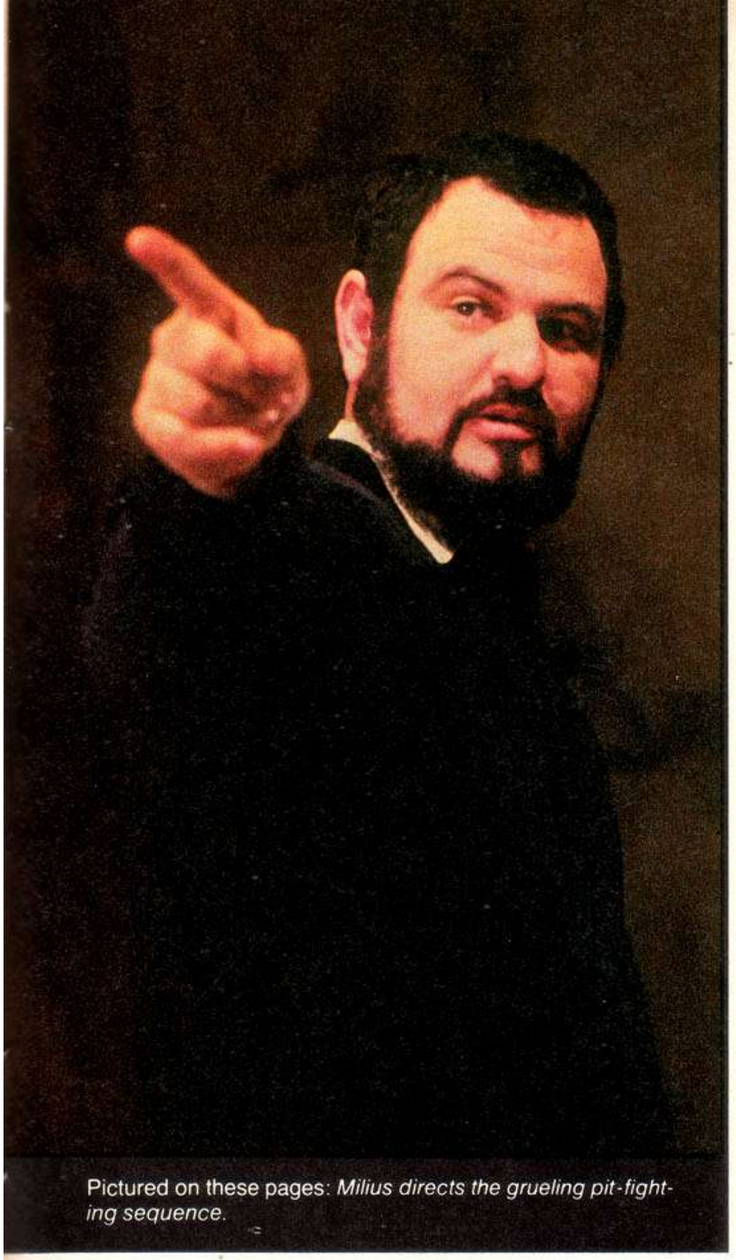
J MILIUS

John Milius is widely acknowledged as one of Hollywood's finest storytellers, whose films are characterized by a spirit of rugged individualism which harks back to men like John Ford. He has previously written and directed *Dillinger* and *The Wind and the Lion* and written scripts for such blockbusters as *Dirty Harry*, *Jerimiah Johnson*, *Big Wednesday*, *Magnum Force* and *Apocalypse Now*. In all of his efforts arises the theme of man's instinctive and frequently violent reaction to circumstances that defy compromise.

All of this would seem to prepare Milius to be the man to be the driving force behind a project such as *Conan*. In many ways, that is just what Milius' role has been. It was Milius who fought for casting which included athletic skill among the criteria (without sacrificing acting ability) rather than just searching out bankable box-office superstars. It was Milius who brought in Ron Cobb as Production Designer because he believed in Cobb's artistic vision. It was Milius who did considerable historical research, in order to create a fantasy setting that might have been, before composing his final version of the screenplay—adapted from an original draft by Oliver (*Midnight Express*) Stone.

John Milius is a strong-willed perfectionist. Much of the credit for the Conan project belongs to him. And, yet, John would be the first to say that *Conan* was a *group effort*. As with a good repertory company, it was this group chemistry that made *Conan* possible—including Milius' ability to channel that chemistry!

DAK: How did you get involved with the



Pictured on these pages: *Milius directs the grueling pit-fighting sequence.*



Conan movie?

MILIUS: I first heard of the Conan project when I was working on a movie of my own. The more I learned about *Conan*, the more I liked it, until I eventually dropped the work on my own film to direct *Conan*.

DAK: What was the reason for changing scripts?

MILIUS: Oliver Stone's script was based on the Robert E. Howard story, "Rogues in the House." I felt the film should more be a story of how Conan came to be.

DAK: Could you elaborate?

MILIUS: Well, over the years, I felt that a lot of the different interpretations of Howard's work, and the different interpretations of the sword-and-sorcery genre had, in a way, diluted Conan. I felt that he should revert back to being a myth—return to the concept of being a pure, undiluted legend, a primal example of mythology. I wanted to achieve the aura of such heroes as Beowulf, Siegried, etc.

DAK: Did you find yourself in any way influenced by the super-hero genre films that were either already released, or in the works?

MILIUS: No, not at all.

DAK: Do you think that the popularity of these other films will help *Conan*?

MILIUS: Well, we'll never know that until the movie comes out.

DAK: Why was Spain chosen as the location for *Conan*?

MILIUS: When I went to the other countries—Yugoslavia, Germany and others—and examined the cost of operating there, and the efficiency of operating there, compared to what I had learned in Spain, well, Spain came out the best. Also, I had made *The Wind and the Lion* there, so I knew the locations and I knew the people and how they worked. In fact, the people who liked *The Wind and the Lion* should love *Conan*.

DAK: What was your working relationship with Arnold like?

MILIUS: Arnold had never had a working relationship with a director in a feature film before. It became a real pleasure and honor to work with him.

He is absolutely disciplined and totally dedicated to the nth degree—so superb in everything he does. He works harder than anyone I've ever seen. He really puts himself into his work.

It's a crude way of putting it, but, in some ways, my relationship with Arnold and the other actors in *Conan* was, as Arnold put it, like, "I was the dog trainer and they were the dogs." I think that happened because *Conan* is a crude —primal—movie. Everything was reduced to its most basic level.

DAK: What were some of the special effects used in this film?

MILIUS: One scene that had a lot of special effects work was when Conan is brought back to health. You have his girlfriend Valeria, and God all together in the scene. That had a lot of special visual effects.

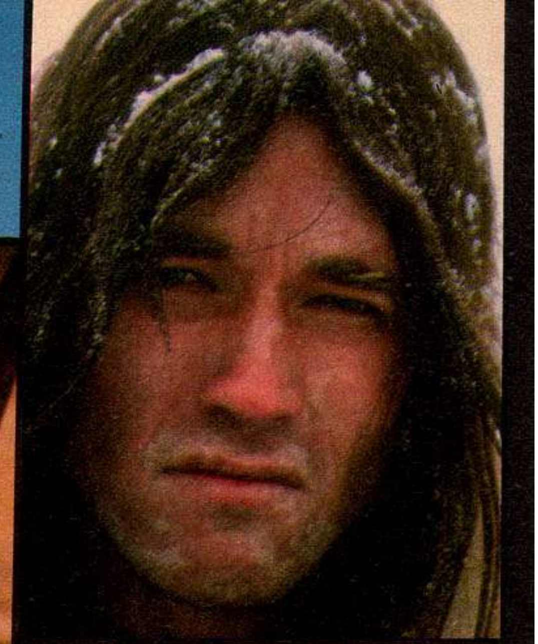
Then, in the Temple of Set, there is the giant snake and the special effects with that.

This movie has a very surreal, dreamlike quality, much like *Apocalypse Now*.

DAK: If the *Conan* movie is well received, is there a possibility of a sequel?

MILIUS: Yes, in fact, work is already being done on it. ●







Perhaps the most monumental problem that might have arisen in doing a film version of Conan could have been casting the title role. This was a job greatly simplified by the existence of an actor who might have been made-to-order for the role.

His name is Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Most people know Arnold as a famous international athlete and body builder. But, like Conan himself, Arnold is by no means that simple!

Arnold was born in Graz, Austria in 1947. His father was a former military officer turned police chief and Arnold spent most of those formative years in the small Austrian village called Thal. At the age of fifteen he discovered body-building. At the time, he told his father: "I

The man who would be Conan...

ARNOLD SCWARZENEGGER

want to be the best-built man in the world —and then I want to go to America and be in the movies. I want to be an actor."

Arnold pursued training and body-building with the fervor of someone who has a clear goal in mind. He describes it thusly: "I set a goal. I visualize it very clearly and create the drive, the hunger, for turning it into reality. There's a kind of joy in that kind of ambition, in having a vision in front of you. With that kind of joy, discipline isn't difficult, or negative, or grim. You love doing what you have to do."

He spent a few years in the Austrian army, where he was able to maintain his bodybuilding (and even won his first award). Then, at 21, Arnold garnered his first Mr. Universe title and realized his dream to come to the United States. Here, he attended UCLA (studying psychology!) and the University of Wisconsin (where he emerged with degrees in Business Administration and International Economics) even while continuing to pile title on title for his athletic accomplishments. So much for the weight-lifter-as-meathead sterotype!

In 1975, Arnold made his film debut in Bob Rafelson's *Stay Hungry* with Sally Field and Jeff Bridges, a film which won no small amount of critical acclaim. For his role, he received the Golden Globe Award for "Best Newcomer."

Arnold Schwarzenegger found acting an enormous but fulfilling challenge. Physical competition is a solitary pursuit, one in which great discipline is required to keep emotions in check, to build a wall against anything from within or without that might negatively affect performance. Acting is quite the opposite. The need to be sensitive to others and to interact is paramount. An actor often must be open and keep defenses down. Still, as with everything he sets out to do, Arnold found he adapted and learned quickly—and that the results were exceedingly gratifying.

Arnold went on to do *Pumping Iron* (1977), *The Villain* (1979—with Kirk Douglas and Ann-Margaret) and *The Jayne Mansfield Story* (1980, for CBS-TV).



Opposite page (clockwise from top left): *Schwarzenegger as a battle-garbed Conan; as a snow-crusted slave of the Vanir; and as a camouflaged lurker in the Temple of Power.* Above: *Thanksgiving dinner the hard way!*

Conan marks Arnold's most important role to date and the achievment of yet another goal—acting in an adventure film, the perfect form for combining his two great loves, acting and athletics. It is a combination he handles with the same flair with which he has handled all other challenges, and which will continue to gather him titles, awards and kudos from admiring audiences!

DAK: How did you first become involved with the movie?
ARNOLD: I met a gentleman by the name of Ed Pressman, who had purchased the movie rights to *Conan*. He approached me in a restaurant and asked me if I was interested in playing Conan. Of course, I said yes. My involvement turned out to be part of a step-by-step process that took about three years, getting all the different aspects to the film settled. Ed Pressman eventually got John Milius to be the director. This was a very good choice, because John has had a lot of experience with adventure films.
DAK: What interested you most about the Conan character?
ARNOLD: Well, first of all, I was attracted to the whole project because it was an adventure film—a bigger-than-life type of adventure film. And this is something that I've always wanted to do. I had read the books and comic-books about Conan, so I was familiar with the character, and I very much wanted to play the part—it was more than what I expected to receive as an actor. The more I got involved with the film, the more I came to love the character.
DAK: Was there a lot of physical challenge for you in the movie?
ARNOLD: I always wanted to be in a John Milius film. John likes his films to be very physical, and likes for his actors to be very committed to their roles.

John was always in there pushing for more and more action. I had to learn all kinds of fighting techniques—I had to learn sword fighting, how to throw axes, ride the horses the way John wanted me to, lift large, heavy objects, so it was very challenging for me to learn how to do all the different things John wanted me to learn, especially since there were a lot of things that I had never done before.

The reason why I think everything went well for me in the movie is because I had to do all this physical training. John was an excellent motivator. Whenever you were in pain, or frustrated during a scene, he would say something like, "pain is only temporary; film is permanent." And, I believe that is true—not only in film, but in life. You can't achieve anything good without first experiencing some sort of pain.
DAK: James Earl Jones mentioned that he received a lot of inspiration for his part from the sets created by production designer Ron Cobb. Did you find yourself

similarly affected?

ARNOLD: One of the many things that you do think about, when you're doing a film *is* the set designing. Everything, from the buildings down to the weapons Rob Cobb designed, was so realistic that you felt as if you were right there. It was so wonderful, the way all this stuff was built. The villages, the interiors—everything he did was so realistic that there was no way that you could not be affected by what you saw. And, if you did not know that they were just stage sets, you'd think that they actually were the real things.

This is one of the key elements that can really go far to help make the spectator—the viewer—feel as if *he* really is right there. So that, for the time that he's watching the film, the viewer can actually believe that he is back in that time, rather than seeing that the film is obviously shot in front of a set. It was one of John's key issues to make things so believable—to make *everything* appear the way it ought to be, from the design of the clothes to the weapons and buildings to every part of people's lives. Everything had to be done right. Clothing that was supposed to have been used a lot, or worn by poorer people, had to be torn and dirty-looking and grimy. I think that Ron Cobb has done the perfect job. He made you, as an actor, feel as if you were right there. You didn't have to work that hard to get into your character. Automatically, you felt that you were back in that time and that you were the person you were supposed to play.

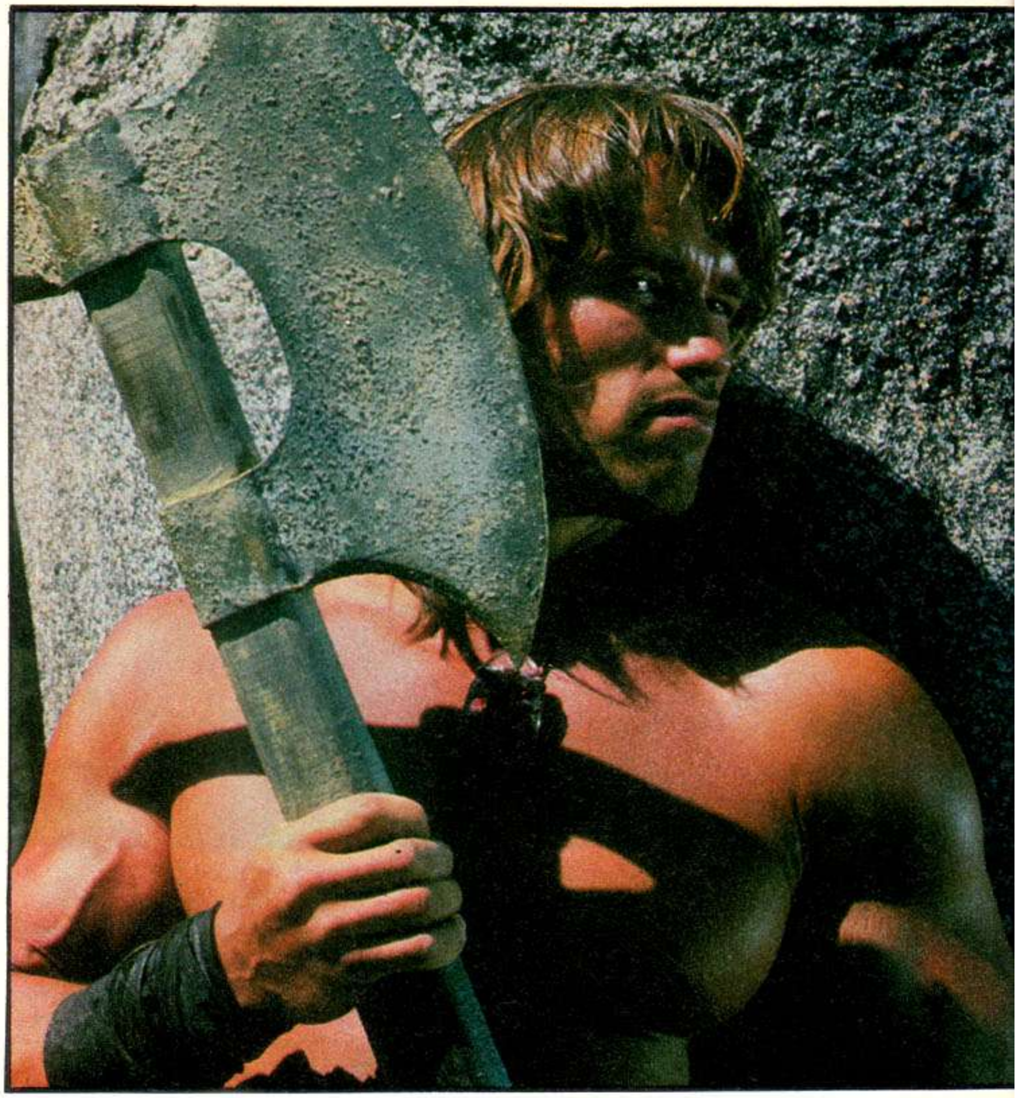
DAK: Could you elaborate on the working arrangement you had with John Milius?

ARNOLD: Basically, I felt that John knew exactly what he wanted in *Conan*, and also what he wanted out of me. He had such an exact vision—a finished product in his mind—that it seemed best not to interfere. Like, a lot of actors say, "Well, the way *I* interpret this scene . . . the way *I* see it . . .or the way *I* have read it . . ." You know, some actors try to think too much. Then, what you have is a vision of the director's conflicting with that of the actor's. When that happens, you can have serious problems. I think that the vision of the film belongs to the director. That is why he is called the director—he is the one who directs you in the scene. You talk about the scene and the character ahead of time, but then, when you do the scene, you run the risk of ruining things if you do not follow the director's instructions. So, in talking with John, I realized that because he had such a vision of the scene, that I could totally give myself over to him, let him direct me through the scene, and let him have the responsibility of making the shot work or not work. I felt my job was to do exactly what John said. And I did that.

I developed a "Dog Theory" during the rehearsals for *Conan*. John called us into the office every day, and us actors would work with him, going through every scene in the script, and we did just exactly what he said. He'd say, "Now, do it over again, I want to hear that dialogue again." And we'd do it twenty times. And, "do that over again," 'lie down on the floor, get up," and so on. The effect was very similar to that in dog training classes, and we all felt as if we actors were in the position of the dogs and John was the trainer. It wound up becoming kind of a joke on the set.

DAK: Did you find a real challenge in making the many fight scenes believable for the audience?

ARNOLD: Again, because we had such good trainers, and further coaching from Terry Leonard, the stunt coordinator, and John Milius, it was very easy to do, in one sense, because John *had* such a clear and easily visualized sense of how the fights should be done. He was very much into doing realistic fight scenes, you know. That means that you really do take a metal sword and you really do slam it down on a metal shield, and if that shield is not at the right place at the right time, the sword really will hit you over the head! So, doing it John's way, with real weapons, you do have facial expressions that show your real emotion. In a way, you don't have to act—you're really fighting!





DAK: Since *Conan* is such a physical movie, did you feel that you were in any danger of getting seriously hurt during these fights?

ARNOLD: I think that the *potential* for danger is what helps make this film really work. The fact that you are facing a very real danger shows in your face. For in-







Portrait of a love: Opposite page, lower left: *Conan and Valeria (Sandahl Bergman) in a quiet moment.* Opposite page, right: *Valeria's memory burning in his brain, Conan waits for the moment to strike at his enemies.* This page, clockwise from upper left: *Conan, Valeria, and Subotai (Gerry Lopez) face the dangers of the Temple of the Serpent. Valeria—warrior woman; and a dramatic look at the beauty that is Valeria.*

stance, if you were in a no-risk situation, as far as your self is concerned, I think that you would really have to act to be scared—to act as if you really were in trouble. This way, having that danger already there, you don't have to act—you *are* in trouble!

DAK: Which scenes did you like working on the most?

ARNOLD: Basically, I liked scenes where sets were built—like, the Mountain of Power, the Torture Chamber, the Temple of Set, those kind of things.

DAK: Could you explain the work involved in the fight scene you had with the giant snake in the Temple of Set?

ARNOLD: Well, the scene took three days to shoot, and everything had to be done step by step. You had to start out with the snake curled around this jewel —the Eye of the Serpent. Then, there was my stealing the jewel, and the fight between me and the snake. And, in the fight itself, I was picked up and thrown around a lot. But it was really important to stage the fight, because there was a lot of set-up work for each part of the fight. You also had to constantly go back to check your continuity before you could begin any part of the fight, too. It was a miserable experience for me, personally, but the whole scene was very well done. The snake was very well designed. And the set, a sort of snake pit, with all kinds of dead bodies lying around, was very realistic.

DAK: Are you looking forward to doing a sequel?

ARNOLD: Of course, that all depends on how well the audience receives the first Conan movie, and all the legal work that would have to be taken care of before a sequel could be shot. But, yes, I would like to do it again very much! ●



He designed an age...

RON COBB



Counter-clockwise from top left: *The Orgy Chamber of Thulsa Doom; a human sacrifice about to descend into the snake-pit; Jones as Doom, preaching from his unholy pulpit—all sets designed by* Ron Cobb.

Ron Cobb's art career did not seriously begin until after he was discharged from the Army. Despite little formal training, Ron felt that it was high time to do something with the skill and talent that he had developed over the years, and immediately after he was discharged, he made his big push into the art field. His first exhibitions were displayed at a Los Angeles area theatre called "The Encore," where his work attracted the attention of such notables as Ray Bradbury. From these exhibitions, Ron was commissioned to do a number of record album jackets and also received a number of personal painting commissions from director John Milius—who would, almost sixteen years later, tap him for the production designer's job on the epic *Conan* movie.

In 1965, Ron began a five year cartooning stint with the famous underground newspaper, "The Free Press." Always interested in traveling and living in different countries, and seeing the underground phenomenon beginning to fade, Ron moved to Australia in 1971, where he lived for a year, travelling extensively through the area. He returned to Los Angeles and was almost immediately contacted by Dan O'Bannon to work on the movie *Dark Star*—for which, amongst other things, he designed the exterior of the space-ship used in the movie. This film proved to be a big step for Ron, Dan and a man named John Carpenter, for all wound up going on to much greater endeavors. Dan to work with Steven Spielberg and to do work on the *Star Wars* film, and John Carpenter to become a director, known for his unforgettable horror film, *Halloween*. Ron himself soon became involved in the *Alien* movie, and, as everyone knows, his work on that famous film received enthusiastic acclaim. Then, *Conan* called, and he was elevated to the position of production designer. But, if you think that Ron has reached the pinnacle of his success and ambition, guess again. For as you will see, as far as Ron's concerned, it's only just begun!

DAK: How did you become involved with the *Conan* movie?

COBB: Shortly after I had finished my work on *Alien*, I was introduced to Ed Pressman who was, at the time, putting together the Conan movie. He saw some samples of my work, liked them, and asked me to do a number of production paintings for *Conan*. I was familiar with the Conan character, from the Robert E. Howard stories, the comic-books all the way through the Frazetta paintings, but I was not what you would call a real fan. I liked what Ed told me and showed me, and agreed to do some work for him. But

I told him that my time would be limited because I had already obligated myself to John Milius. John was developing a mountain man film at the time, and since he had contacted me before Ed, I felt that I would have to begin work on John's film when he called. Ed said that was fine with him, as his own project was still very much in the formative stages. I wound up putting in about a month's worth of design work on *Conan*, before I got the call from John to start in on his mountain man movie.

While in the middle of his own film, John heard more and more about the Conan movie and became increasingly interested in directing it. Eventually, Ed Pressman did approach John with the offer. Suddenly, all work on the mountain man movie stopped and we were off doing *Conan*! Not only that, but John did something that was really extraordinary —he fought to have me made production designer of the whole film! This was really unusual, and John did have to fight to get this done, because I had almost virtually no experience in that position! The most I had ever done in that area before was some work on *Alien*, but in no way did that really qualify me for the job. However, John won out and I was given this highly responsible position. To say the least, it was a tremendous opportunity for me. And, I am very, very grateful to John for giving me the chance and for trusting me and my ability to do the job.

DAK: Given the fact that this was your first time out as a production designer, how much latitude were you given?

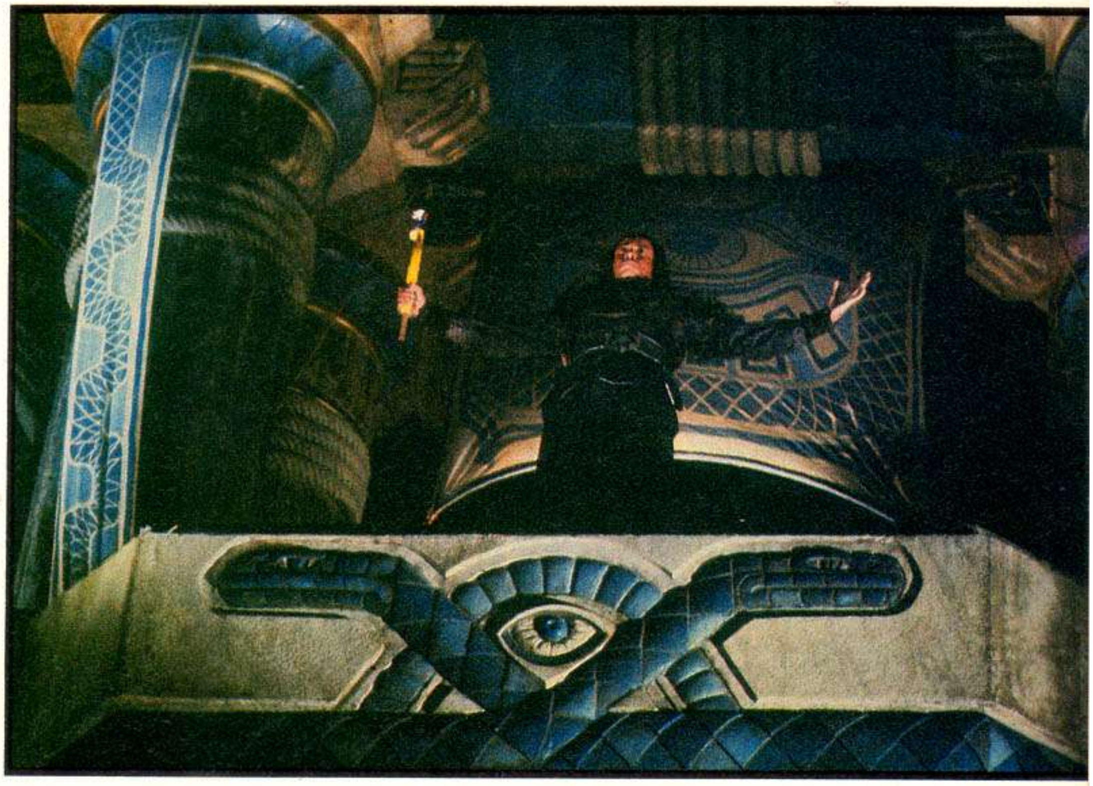
COBB: Of course, I don't have other films I could compare it to, but, judging from comments made by other production designers and art directors, I wound up having enormous latitude and freedom—restricted only by the budget and oddities of location sites. John pretty much left the whole look of the picture up to me. In comparison, Ridley Scott, the director on *Alien*, worked very closely with his designers and art directors because he is a more visual director. Being left out on my own, especially for my first time out,was a little bit frightening, but as it turned out, John loved everything I created.

DAK: What challenges faced you in the creation of Howard's Hyborean Age for the movie?

COBB: John and I, right from the start, wanted to give the film an almost *historical* look—very believable within this obviously fantasy film. At the same time, we wanted to incorporate that dynamic spirit that is so evident in Howard's stories and Frazetta's paintings. So, from the beginning, the vision of the sets was a mixture of our own vision, and bits and pieces of the different genres that had preceeded us—balanced, of course, by the practical limitations of movie making.

I was very much intrigued by the prospect of designing whole new (or old, as it were) cultures—from costumes, architecture, life-styles down to even the smallest details.

Where I was really able to cut loose was with the Cult of Set—the religious sect that Conan fights against in this film. John borrowed the King Kull villain, sorcerer Thulsa Doom, and used him as the high priest of Set. Around him, and the snake symbols, I wanted to give an exotic, sort of Aztec, look—combined with the feel that one gets from visiting the garish, ornate temples found in southeast Asia. When I was living in Australia, I travelled a lot through Asia and was very much struck by the exotic, gaudy quality of the Hindu temples—the painted plaster, the garish colors—the almost psychedlic imagery. So a lot of what I saw and experienced during those trips was adapted into this movie.



It was also very interesting to design a religion from beginning to end, going into all the details, like the lesser deities, the religious beliefs from life and death on down, the symbols like the Eye of Set, etc. I even designed the written language, a sort of hieroglyphic, and did the assassination dagger.

The giant Snake of Set was constructed by Peter Forsey, an Englishman, from a series of detailed renderings I did. Peter's a marvelous sculptor, who did some work on *Alien*. He did an excellent job of making the snake realistic. The most demanding work on the snake was done by the special effects man, Nick Allder, who did the construction of the incredibly complicated hydraulic mechanism inside the snake. The beauty of this snake is that it could be operated without any external wires. And the snake was so strong that it could actually lift Arnold Schwarzennegger off the ground!

DAK: Did you work out a very detailed storyboard for the movie?

COBB: I was not in a position to actually do this, because the bulk of my time on the movie—two-and-a-half years—was spent in the actual implementation of the scenes for the story, itself. So, what happened was, we called in fantasy artist Bill Stout to do some storyboard work. And, when I was overseas, looking at sites in Yugoslavia and Spain, John was in Los Angeles working with another artist on storyboarding some particularly difficult special effects. But there really was no overall storyboard for the film.

DAK: Once you had the sites selected, and the designs drawn up, then you had to go out and get the sets constructed?

COBB: Yes. I was very involved in the production and construction of the sets. I had two art directors under me who implemented a lot of my ideas, but I found myself overseeing a lot of the actual construction myself. I also was traveling all over Spain, from one set location to the other, making all manner of aesthetic decisions about color, angles, and any of the thousands of little problems that always crop up.

When we were in the actual shooting of a set, I would be very involved in the initial phases of the scene. I would make sure that all of the various elements were in the scene, everything was properly set up, and that it was all done to John's liking. Once the shooting really got underway, I would usually leave the set and go off somewhere else, like another set under construction, or the location of the next set to be used, etc.

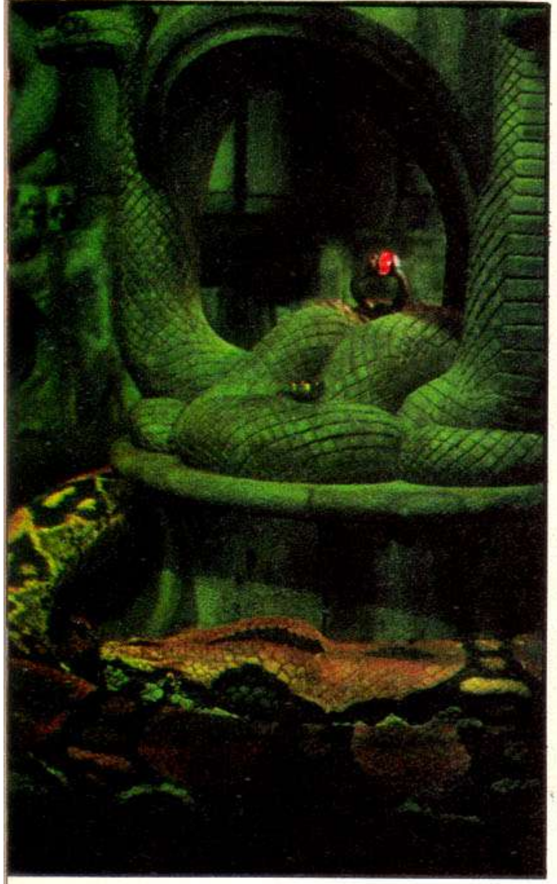
In the course of all of this, John also gave me the opportunity to do some of the second unit work. This was where I would go out with a camera crew and take some scenes of Conan riding through the mountains, the making of the sword, and some of the atmospheric shots of traveling. Occasionally, we would use doubles of the principal actors. And, occasionally, we would discover that we had missed something on a set, and I'd be assigned to go back and reshoot the scene. That wound up being very good experience for me. Terry Leonard was the official second unit director, and he did most of the work, which was very, very good. I just filled in when necessary.

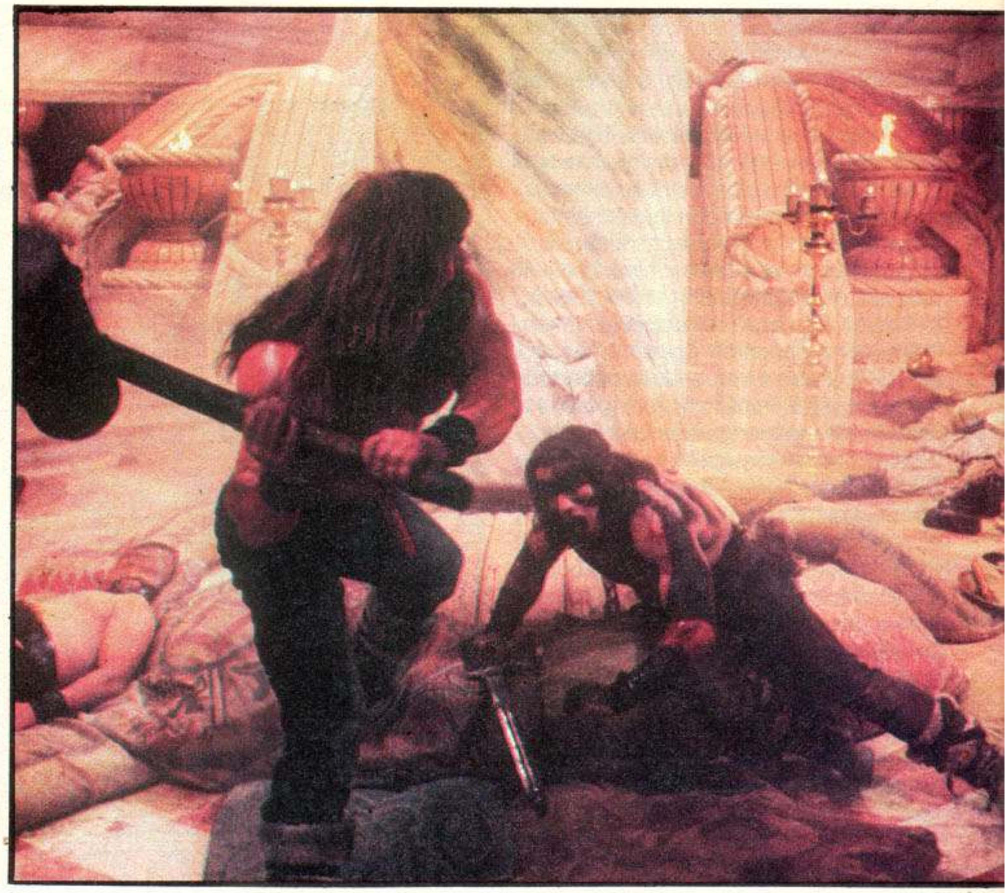
DAK: Did you have to make any special consideration, in the construction of your sets, for Arnold's great strength?

COBB: Well, in one scene Arnold was supposed to lift this simulated stone pot and huge wrought-iron cradle. In this case, the iron was real. Though we made the pot out of fiberglass, the whole thing wound up being incredibly heavy—in fact, he almost could not lift it! It was something to watch him strain, his huge muscles bulging, to lift and carry this whole thing the distance required for the scene.

In another case, we had a huge horizontal wheel—with great big spokes on it—that Arnold pushed. This was where Arnold supposedly got his great strength. The wheel was supposed to be a massive grindstone for grain. We built this gigantic set out of simulated logs and timber, wrapped around a steel frame that was imbedded in a concrete base. The amazing thing about this apparatus was that, as massive and ponderous as it looked, it was really very easy to turn. So, when Arnold would get out there and start pushing, the spokes would start whizzing around at an incredibly fast speed. He could actually push it with one hand! So, to give the illusion of great resistance, members of the art department would be positioned at other spokes, off camera, and be pushing in the opposite direction.

DAK: Has your work as a production





Cobb's painstakingly elaborate sets give an undeniable sense of reality to the lair of the serpent (top left and below) *and the battle in the Orgy Chamer* (above).



designer for *Conan* whetted your appetite to do more?

COBB: There is certainly an ongoing fascination and desire to design for film. I sort of knew it would lead to this, and I wouldn't rule out the desire for me to work on a *Conan* sequel. My *Conan* movie experience proved that I very much enjoy my work. I like to specialize in fantasy and science-fiction because, with them, I don't have the restriction of recreating something that's already existed, like you would in a period piece—a western, for instance. And I am fascinated with the problem of taking an obvious fantasy setting and creating a sense of realism in the set.

I'm also thinking of writing screenplays—this is something I've always had

in the back of my mind—and possibly even directing, at a future date. When, and if, that ever happens, I still want to continue with the production designing. And it is a definite possibility that I will be directing a movie, because I have had offers, though it would be very premature to discuss them in any detail right now. The opportunity does exist, so it more depends on me to get up enough nerve to actually go out and do it.

DAK: Has work on this movie influenced your artistic style in any way?

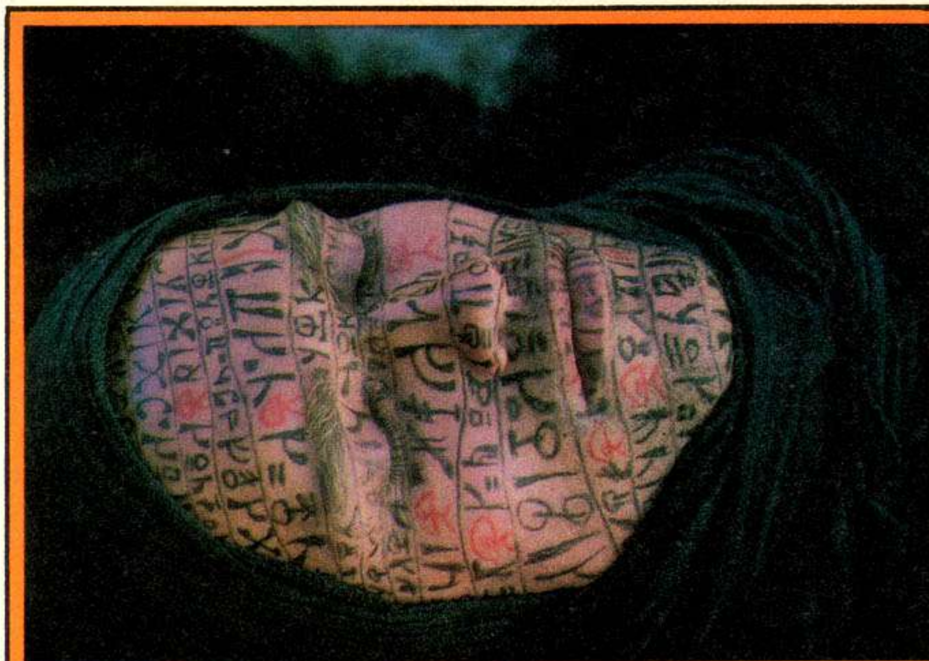
COBB: Well, I hope that it broadly improves my ability. In the case of *Conan*, it gave me an opportunity to think long and hard about the ancient world and all the details that go into all levels of life. Now, I have a very good idea of what constitutes a technology that is sort of comparable to the Middle Ages of our history. It was especially interesting, for instance, to work through your mind how one uses water, how you light a room, where wagons go, etc. It eventually became so involved for me that, for a while, I felt that I was actually living in this ancient world I was creating.

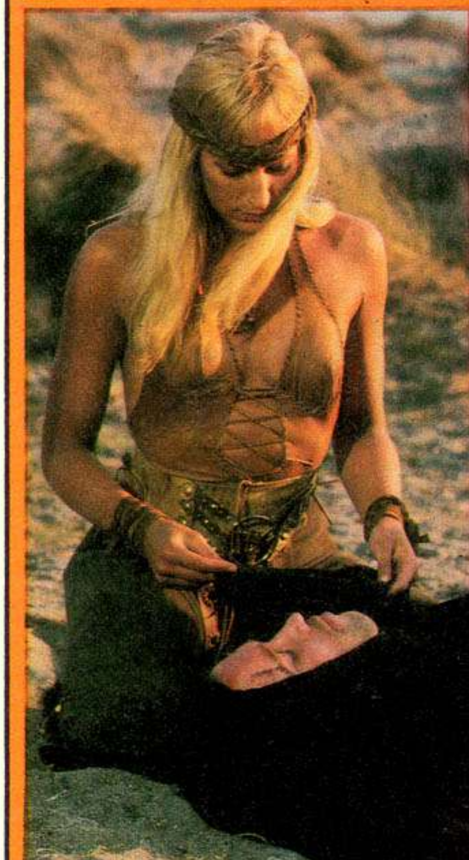
Another source of inspirarion were the craftsmen that worked under me. The Spanish crews had a long history of working on films including such movies as *Lawrence of Arabia*, Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns, and Milius' own *The Wind and the Lion*. They were very familiar with the demands of movie construction and applied an old world craftsmanship to their labor that, in some ways, was far superior to anything I had ever seen done elsewhere. For instance, in doing the interior of the Cult of Set's chamber, they finished and polished the plaster in such a way that, even looking closely at the columns, unless you knew they were plaster, you'd swear they were marble. I was just in awe of the quality of these craftsmen and their work.

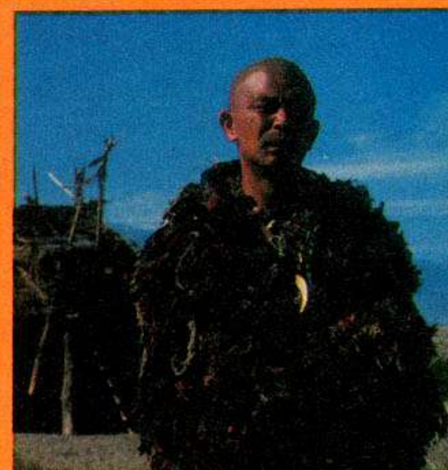
DAK: So you think you've done justice, overall, to the Conan mythos with this film?

COBB: Yes. I should mention that John is bringing his own vision to the legend. His screenplay is excellent and really captures the spirit of Conan. What most people don't realize is that some things that work in text or comics don't come off, or can't be done as effectively, in the movies, and vice versa. Each medium has its own strengths and weaknesses and it is the knowledge of these that can turn a story into an event worth experiencing.

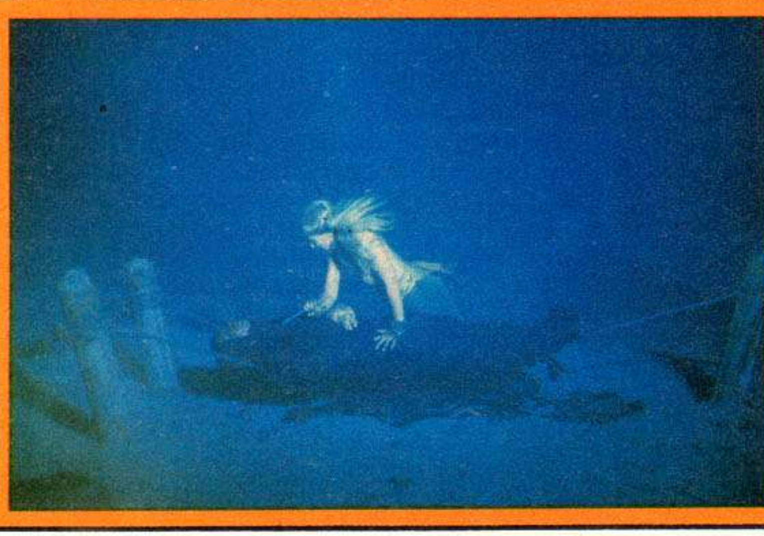
In the case of this movie, I think that the audience will find it to be more of an adventure story than a sorcerous one. John wound up being relatively light on the magic and concentrated more on the battles and psychological aspects of the story. But that was an important part of the barbarian world, and John wanted that complete barbarian experience to be there.







As the horribly tortured Conan hovers between life and death, Valeria and the wizard work arcane magicks to seize the Cimmerian from the grasp of the gods of death. In the end . . . the mortals are victorious.





From darth to doom... JAMES EARL JONES

Ironically, James Earl Jones is perhaps most famous not for what he has done on stage and screen, but for what he has done in the *sound studio*. As almost everyone knows, his is the menacing sepulchral voice of Darth Vader in *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Jones has appeared, before camera, in many films—his first role was that of a navigator in a B-52 bomber in *Dr. Strangelove*. But Jones' acting career has not been limited to just movies. He has had a long and illustrious career both on and off Broadway. At press time he is thrilling New York audiences with his stunning performance of *Othello*.

An excellent character actor, he now finds himself offered more anti-hero and villainous roles, not only because of the quality of his voice, but also because he is older. The heroes, it seems, are predominantly the younger actors, while the villains are the older. If that truly becomes the case with James Earl Jones, by the time he reaches age sixty, he will become filmland's ultimate personification of evil!

DAK: What attracted you to the part of Thulsa Doom?

JEJ: I had read John Gardner's *Grendel*, and had, from that moment, had a very strong desire to play that role. However, I was very disappointed to learn that it was to be produced as an animated feature. So, when I was presented the *Conan* script, and read the part of Thulsa Doom, and saw that it was going to be a live-action movie, I gladly accepted the part.

DAK: How did you and director John Milius approach the character of Thulsa Doom?

JEJ: One of the things that John suggested that I do was read all I could about the Cult of Assassins—from the very first mention of them, up to present day. I did this, and I also read about Thulsa Doom, who was actually a character in the *King Kull* sagas of Robert E. Howard, because I do a lot of research for any character I portray. But, John's particular emphasis on the assassins was very, very helpful and gave me an added insight into the character he wanted me to play.

One thing that John did, which was actually suggested by Arnold Schwarzenegger, was very, very interesting to me as an actor, because I had never seen this done before. When we were on location, one of the first things that Arnold said to John was, something like, "Treat me like a dog you are training. You want me to look up, tell me to look up, you want me to look down and scowl, tell me to look down and scowl," and so on. The reason for this was that Arnold had not had much experience as an actor and as a result, literally turned himself over to the director, saying, "Use me as you will." I was very fascinated by this, because it was the first time I had ever encountered such a thing, and I went up to John and said, "Look, why don't you try that with me, also?" It was a very revealing experience, and one that helped me out quite a bit. It places a lot of an actor's faith in the director, but if the opportunity should present itself, I do plan on doing this same thing again.

John is very, very good. He knows how to stage the action he wants, and how to get the actors to deliver it the way he wants without offending anyone. He was very demanding, but he treated us all as individuals.

DAK: How did you prepare yourself for getting into character?

JEJ: That was perhaps the simplest part of all, because of the incredible sets constructed by Ron Cobb. He went into such extensive detail, and had such incredible vision, that the moment you walked onto the set, you felt as if you really were back in that time period! You could almost literally feel the primal power, like in the Temple of Set, emanating from the props. So, it was very easy to assume the role of Thulsa Doom.

DAK: How long were you involved in the location filming of *Conan*?

JEJ: Well, my participation occurred in two stages, because I was, at the time, working on a Broadway play. The people on *Conan* were very understanding, and worked out their shooting schedule around my performing schedule, so everything wound up working out very well. I was first in Spain for two weeks, then I returned to New York and the play, and then, after a few weeks had passed, I returned again to Spain, where I spent my longest period on location.

DAK: But your work on *Conan* did not end once the location shooting was fin-



Opposite page: *Thulsa Doom leads his followers into evil.* Above: *Doom, on horseback, surveys the fall of Cimmeria.* Below: *Doom prepares to launch his serpent-arrow as Rexor (Ben Davidson) looks on.*



ished?

JEJ: Oh, no. Once the location work was done, we had to do the looping—going into the sound studios and redoing the dialogue when outside noise beyond our control interfered with a shot. A common problem we had was jet plane noise.

It is too bad, too, for in one scene, I don't think that we will be able to match what was done on location. I was delivering a long speech at the narrow end of this amphitheatre-like location. The speech will actually be much shorter in the final version, I'm sure. But the effect that I achieved, from the spot where I was standing, I do not think that it will be properly duplicated in the sound studio.

DAK: Did you have an opportunity to see the dailies, to see how you did under John's direction?

JEJ: No, I did not.

DAK: Did you socialize much with the other actors?

JEJ: A little, but everyone was very, very busy, so there really wasn't much of an opportunity to socialize. We were all memorizing lines, or practicing with our trainers, because this was a very physical film, and a lot of us did need training for our parts. I'm not a very athletic man, myself, so the role of Thulsa Doom was somewhat of a challenge for me because some of the things he did, like ride a horse, for instance, I had never done myself. So, I learned how to ride. And, as you might expect, I had the usual embarrassing moment when I wanted to go forward, and the horse wanted to go backward, with the result that I fell off the horse.

One thing that I did get involved in was working out in the gymnasium that had been set up for Arnold and the other bodybuilders in the film. Arnold had invited me to join him and I eventually got involved in the routine of working out on the exercise machines. The only bad thing about working out on the machines occurred after I was through on location and returned to the United States. I had ordered my own exercise machine, and it was three weeks before it was set up for use. The result of that was that my muscles got flabby. But, that is no longer the case, now.

DAK: It appears, then, that you and Arnold got along very well. Had you met before *Conan*?

JEJ: I was working on the Ted Kennedy presidential campaign, and had phoned the campaign headquarters in California, and found out that the person on the other end of the line was Arnold! So, though we did not actually meet until the movie, *Conan*, we had already gotten to know each other through our political work.

DAK: What was a day's schedule like in Spain?

JEJ: We would be up before dawn, when we would get into makeup and costumes. We would begin shooting at the different locations in Spain as soon as light permitted, and work all through the day, six days a week—with lunch, of course, served at the set.

DAK: Since this was a physical movie, did you do many of your own stunts?

JEJ: No. I am not really that physical an actor, as I said, so almost all of my stunts were done by a stuntman, an excellent man, I should add, who did an outstanding job for me. His name is Brubaker, and he is really one of the finest stuntmen I've seen in the business.

DAK: What was the most satisfying scene for you in the whole picture?

JEJ: There was no one scene, it was more like in a set—the Temple of Set. And, again, that goes back to Ron Cobb's excellent work. I think that his work will be one of the reasons that the film will succeed, because he was able to achieve such incredible mood and realism with his sets. ●



